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TIMAR'S TWO WORLDS

TIMAR'S TWO WORLDS

BY

MAURUS JOKAI

AUTHORISED TRANSLATION

BY

MRS HEGAN KENNARD

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS
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BOOK SECOND

TIMÉA

(CONTINUED)

TIMAR'S TWO WORLDS.

CHAPTER VI.

ANOTHER JEST.

THE newly ennobled Herr von Levetinczy was already, not only in Hungary but in Vienna, a famous person. He was said to be a "golden man." Everything he touched turned to gold, all he undertook became a gold-mine; and this is the real gold-mine.

The science of the gold-digger consists in finding out earlier than his rivals what large affairs are in contemplation by the Government; and in this art Timar was a past master. If he took up any speculation, a whole swarm of speculators threw themselves upon it, for

they knew money was to be had there for the picking up.

But it was not only on that account that Timar was called a "golden man," but also for quite another reason.

He never swindled or defrauded any one.

He made large profits, for he undertook large concerns, but he was never tempted to steal or lie, for he never risked anything. He shared the profit with those on whom it depended whether he received a contract on reasonable terms, and in this way kept the source always open.

Once he began to buy up vineyards on the Monostor, the highest point of Komorn. It is a sandhill lying above Uj-Szöny, and its wines are very poor. But notwithstanding this, Timár bought ten acres of vine-growing land there.

This excited attention in the commercial world. What could he want with it? There must be some sort of gold-mine there.

Herr Brazovics thought he was on the right track, and attacked Katschuka on his own

ground. "Now, my dear son, tell me the truth; I swear by my soul and my honour that I will not betray it to a creature. Confess now, the Government is going to build fortifications on the Monostor? That fellow Timar is buying up all the land: don't let us leave him the whole mouthful. It is so, isn't it,—they are going to build a fort there?"

The Captain allowed the acknowledgment to be got out of him that there might be something in it. The Council of War had decided to extend the fortifications of Komorn in that direction. There could be no better news for Athanas. How many hundred thousand gulden had he made in similar circumstances by buying hovels before the expropriation, and selling them afterwards to the Government at the price of palaces? Only he would certainly like to have seen the plans, and begged his future son-in-law as prettily as possible to let him have just one peep at them.

Katschuka did him that favour too, and thus Athanas learnt what portion would be bought by Government. And that wretch of a Timar

had really pitched on the place where the fort was to be built.

"And what are to be the terms of the expropriation?"

That was the question, and that the Captain could not reveal without committing a capital crime. But he did it. The terms were, that the Government would pay double the last purchase-money.

"Now I know enough," cried Herr Athanas, embracing his son-in-law; "the rest is my affair. On your wedding-day the hundred thousand gulden will be on your table."

But he was wrong in thinking that he knew enough. He would have done well to ask one more question. Herr Katschuka, after saying so much, would have told him that too. But Katschuka no longer cared much about the hundred thousand gulden, nor yet about what depended on them. If he gets them, all right; if not, his hair will not turn grey for lack of them.

Brazovics hurried off to Uj-Szöny, and went to all the vine-growers to ask who had a vine-

yard to sell. He paid whatever was asked, and if any one refused to sell, he offered treble the price. The more he paid, the better for him. Naturally this attracted the attention of other speculators, who arrived in troops and ran up the prices, so that the poor "Hönigler" and "Schafschwanz" wines of Monostor could not understand why they had suddenly turned into "Grands Crûs," to be bought up even before the vintage.

The price of vineyards ran so high, that the land for which the Government would have had to pay, before the plans were betrayed, at most 100,000 gulden, now could not be bought under 500,000.

Brazovics had himself bought a fifth of them, though he had the greatest difficulty in getting the money together. He got rid of his stock of grain, sold his ships, borrowed from the usurers, and made use of trust-money committed to his care. This time he was safe! Timar was in the swim. He was the worst off, for he had bought cheap and would make a very small profit.

But this, too, was perfidy on Timar's part. It was a *coup* aimed at the head of Herr Brazovics. He had learnt from Katschuka the one thing Athanas had omitted to ask. It was true that the Government would this year greatly enlarge the fortifications; but the question was, Where would they begin? For the work would extend over thirty years.

Here again Timar had done his rivals a bad turn, which would bring their maledictions down on him. As a good business man, he took care, whenever he had undertaken anything which would bring him curses, to set something else to work for which many more would bless him. So that between blessing and cursing he might keep a good balance on the credit side.

He sent for Johann Fabula, and said to him, "Johann, you are getting old; many hardships have aged you. Would it not be better to look out for some employment which will allow you to rest?"

Fabula was already hoarse, and when he

spoke, it sounded as if he was whispering to the actors from the prompter's box.

"Yes, sir; I have often thought of leaving the sea and looking out for work on shore; my eyes are weak. I wish you would give me a stewardship on your land."

"I know of something better than that. You would never get on with the Rascians; you are too much used to the white bread at Komorn. Much better turn farmer."

"I should like it well enough; but there are two things wanting—the land and the stock."

"Both will come in time. I have an idea: the old pastures by the river are for sale—go to the auction and buy them all."

"Oh," said Fabula, with a hoarse laugh, "I should be a fool indeed! It is a waste where nothing grows but camomile. Shall I sell it to the chemists? And it's a large piece of land; one would want several thousand gulden."

"Don't argue, but do as I tell you. Just you go there. Here are the two thousand gulden for the deposit, which you must hand in at the auction. Then bid till it is knocked down

to you, and take it all at the price agreed on. Share with no one, whoever offers to go into partnership with you. I will lend you the money to pay for it, and you shall repay me when you are able. I ask no interest, and you need not give me a receipt. The whole bargain shall be a verbal one. There now, shake hands on it!"

Johann Fabula shook his head thoughtfully. "No interest, no writing, a lump of money, and bad waste land! The end of it will be, that I shall be arrested and stripped to my shirt."

"No scruples, my friend; you have it for a year, and whatever you get off it meanwhile will be entirely yours."

"But what shall I plough and sow with?"

"You will neither plough nor sow. But go and do what I told you—the harvest will not be wanting; but do not tell any one."

Fabula was in the habit of looking on all that Timar did or said as folly *à priori;* but nevertheless he acted with absolute obedience on his orders, for *à posteriori* he had been forced to

acknowledge that these unheard-of follies had the same result as if they had been wisdom personified. So he did as Timar had advised.

And now we will let the reader into the secret of these singular proceedings. The plan for the fortifications did really exist. But it had been suggested to the Council by some busybody that it was not necessary to execute all the sections at once, and that it would be sufficient for the present to expropriate the land lying between the two arms of the river, while the portion covered by the Monostor vineyards could wait twenty years. Now the speculators who got wind of the new plans had all thrown themselves on the sandhill, and no one thought of the shore between the two river branches. Herr Fabula got it for twenty thousand gulden. The land on the Monostor would not be wanted for twenty years to come, and during that time the money invested in the unproductive vineyards would all be eaten up by the interest. This was a trick played by Timar especially for the benefit of Herr Athanas Brazovics; and as soon as he had bought the Monostor vineyards,

Timar set every lever in motion to prevent the Council of War from beginning the fortifications on all points at the same time.

Affairs were in this position three days before the time fixed for Athalie's wedding.

Two days before it Johann Fabula came flying into Timar's house. Yes, flying—his floating cloak represented the wings.

"Ten thousand! Twenty thousand! Forty thousand! Commission paid! The emperor! The king! Pasture! The crop!" He gasped out disconnected words, which Timar at last put together.

"All right, Johann; I know what you mean. The Commission has come to settle the value of the land wanted for the new works. Your fields, bought for twenty thousand, will be sold by you for forty thousand: the surplus is your profit; that is the crop—did not I tell you?"

"Yes, sir; and they were words like those of the golden-mouthed St John. I see very clearly that you told me the truth, and I see that I get the twenty thousand gulden for nothing. Never in my life did I earn so much money by the

hardest work. My senses are going. Do let me turn a somersault!"

Timar had no objection. Johann Fabula turned not one but three somersaults all across the floor, and then three back again; and then stood straight on his legs again before Timar.

"There! now I am all right again. All that money belongs to me."

He came six times that day to pay a visit to Timar. First he brought his wife, then his younger daughter, then his married daughter, afterwards his son who had left college, and the fifth time the little boy who was still at school. His wife brought Timar a splendid Komorn loaf of white bread with a brown glazed crust; the married daughter a dish of beautiful Indian-corn cakes; the unmarried one a plate of red eggs, gilt nuts, and honey-cakes decorated with coloured paper like a wedding present; the big boy, who was a noted bird-catcher, brought a cage full of linnets and robins; and the schoolboy declaimed a rhymed ode. The whole day they overwhelmed him with gratitude, and the sixth time they all came

together late in the evening and sang in his honour a song of praise out of the Hymn-book.

But what will his competitors, and especially Herr Brazovics, bring and sing to him when they learn how he has entrapped them about the purchase of the Monostor?

CHAPTER VII.

THE WEDDING-DRESS.

THE wedding was to be in three days' time.

On Sunday afternoon Athalie went to pay visits in turn to all her school friends. It is one of the bride's privileges to pay these visits without her mother; they have so much to say to each other the last time in all their girlhood.

Frau Sophie was delighted to be allowed to stay at home one day in the year, and neither pay nor receive calls—not to act as chaperon to her daughter and listen to conversation in German, of which she did not understand a word. She could remain at home and think of her happy parlour-maid times—the days when on an idle Sunday like this she could fill her apron with ears of Indian corn, and sit down on the bench

before the door picking out the grains one by one and cracking them, while she chatted and gossiped with her companions. To-day the leisure time and the boiled ears of maize were at hand, but the friends and the gossip on the bench were wanting. Frau Sophie had allowed the maid-servants and the cook to go out, that she might have the kitchen to herself; for you cannot eat corn in the parlour on account of the husks which get strewn about. In the end she found suitable company. Timéa came creeping up to her. She also had no work to do. The embroidery was finished, and the dress had gone to the needle-woman, who would send it home at the last moment. Timéa was quite suited to the kitchen bench beside Frau Sophie. They were both only on sufferance in the house. The difference was that Timéa felt herself a lady, though every one looked on her as a servant; while all the world knew that Frau Sophie was the mistress of the house, and yet she felt like a servant. So Timéa perched herself on the little bench near Frau Sophie, as the nursery-maid and the cook

do after quarrelling all the week, when they make it up on Sunday and have a chat together.

Only three days and then the marriage!

Timéa looked cautiously round to see if any listeners were near to overhear, and then in a low voice asked, "Mama Sophie, do tell me what is a wedding like?"

Frau Sophie drew her shoulders up and shook like a person who laughs internally, looking with half-shut eyes at the inquiring child. With the malicious delight old servants take in deceiving young ones, she encouraged the laughable simplicity of the girl. "Yes, Timéa," in the important tone of a story-teller, "that is a wonderful sight. You will see it."

"I tried once to listen at the church door," confessed Timéa, frankly; "I had crept in when a wedding was going on, but all I could see was that the bride and bridegroom stood before a lovely golden shrine."

"That was the altar."

"Then a naughty boy saw me and drove

me away, calling out 'Be off, you Turkish brat!' Then I ran away."

"You must know," began Sophie, whilst she took out a grain at a time and put them in her mouth, "that then comes the venerable pope, with a golden cap on his head, on his shoulders a robe of rustling silk worked with gold, and carrying a great book with clasps in his hand. He reads and sings most beautifully, and then the bridal pair kneel on the steps of the altar. The pope asks them both whether they love each other."

"And are they obliged to answer?"

"Of course, silly; and not only that, but the priest reads out of the big book an oath to the bridegroom and then afterwards to the bride, that they will love and keep to each other till death divides them. They swear it by the Holy Trinity and the Blessed Virgin and all the saints, for ever and ever, Amen; and the whole choir repeats the Amen. Then the priest takes the two rings from a silver dish and puts one on each of their third fingers, makes them clasp hands and winds

a golden girdle round them, while the precentor and the choir sing to the organ 'Gospodi Pomiluj.'"[1]

The melancholy sound of the words "Gospodi Pomiluj" pleased Timéa. That must be some magic blessing.

"Then they cover the bridegroom and also the bride with a flowered-silk veil from head to foot, and whilst the pope blesses them the two witnesses hold a silver crown over each."

"Ah!"

When Frau Sophie noticed the deep interest of the girl she got warmer and warmer, and tried to inflame her fancy with the splendours of the Greek ritual. "The choir goes on singing, and the pope takes one crown and makes the bridegroom kiss it, then places it on his head and says, 'I crown thee as servant of God and husband of this handmaid of the Lord.' Then he takes the other crown, gives it to the bride to kiss, and says to her, 'I crown thee as handmaid of the Lord, and wife of this servant of God.' The deacon

[1] Lord have mercy on us.

begins to pray for the young pair, and meanwhile the priest leads them three times round the altar, and the witnesses take off the veil which covered them. The church is full of people, who all look and whisper, 'That is a bride to be kissed. What a beautiful pair!'"

Timéa nodded her head with girlish delight, as if to say, "That is delightful; it must be lovely."

"Then the pope brings out a golden cup of wine, and the bride and bridegroom drink from it."

"Is there really wine in it?" asked Timéa in alarm. Her fear of wine came partly from the recollection of the prohibition in the Koran.

"Of course there is—real wine. Then the bridesmaids and groomsmen throw maize baked in honey over them; that brings luck. It is lovely, I can tell you."

Timéa's eyes shone with the prophetic fire of a magnetic dream. She pictured these mysterious proceedings to herself as partly a rite, partly an enigma of the heart, and trembled all

over. Sophie laughed in her sleeve and found this most amusing; a pity she should be disturbed in it. Manly steps approached the kitchen door, and some one came in.

What a surprise! it was Herr Katschuka.

The mistress of the house was horrified, for she had only slippers on and her apron full of maize. Which should she hide first? But Timéa was more frightened, though she had nothing to hide.

"Excuse me," said Katschuka with familiar ease; "I found the doors all shut on the other side, so I came round by the kitchen."

"You see," screeched Frau Sophie, "my daughter has gone to visit her friends. I sent the maids to church, and we two are the only ones at home; so we just sat down in the kitchen. Pray excuse our *négligé*, Herr Captain."

"Don't disturb yourself, I will remain with you here."

"Oh no, I could not allow it. Here in the kitchen! We have not even a chair for the Captain."

But Herr Katschuka knew what to do in any emergency. "Don't make a stranger of me, Mama Sophie. Here, this can will do for a seat," and he sat down opposite Timéa on a pail, and even set the hostess at ease with respect to the ears of maize. "That is excellent for dessert; give me a handful in my cap. I like it very much."

Frau Sophie was on the broad grin when she saw that the Captain did not disdain to take the vulgar sweets in his military cap, and eat a quantity without even shelling them. It made him very popular with his mother-in-law. "I was in the midst of an interesting conversation with Timéa," began Sophie; "she was asking me about—a baptism."

Timéa was on the point of rushing away, if Frau Sophie had told the truth; but she would not have been the mother of a marriageable daughter if she had not possessed the art of turning the conversation at the entrance of an unexpected visitor.

"I was describing a baptism to her. She is quite frightened at it. Just look how she is

trembling ; for I was telling her that she would have to be wrapped up like a baby and carried in arms, and that she must cry like one. Don't be alarmed, you little fool. It is not true, I was only joking. Her greatest trouble is that her hair will be all spoilt."

This requires explanation. Timéa had splendid long thick hair. Athalie amused herself by making the hairdresser execute on it the most surprising coiffures. Sometimes all the hair was combed up and built into a tower, again it was frizzed into wings on each side over the ear ; in short, the girl had to appear in the most ridiculous head-dresses, such as no one had ever worn, and which required the unsparing use of tongs, pincers, brushes, and pomade. Athalie pretended to do this out of affection for her cousin, and the poor child had no idea how she was disfigured by it.

Herr Katschuka undeceived her. "Fräulein Timéa, you need not regret this coiffure. It would suit you much better if you wore your hair quite plain ; you have such lovely hair, that it is a sin to burn it with irons and smear it

with pomade. Do not allow it; it is a shame to lose any of your magnificent hair, and it is soon ruined by the ill-treatment which ladies call hairdressing,—it loses its brilliancy, splits at the points, breaks easily, and falls early. You do not require all that artificial structure. Your hair is so beautiful that you need only plait it plainly to possess the finest of all coiffures." It is possible that Herr Katschuka only said this out of a humane sympathy with the ill-treated head of hair, and meant merely to free it from the tortures inflicted on it. But his words had a deeper effect than he expected. From that moment Timéa had a feeling as if the comb in her hair was splitting her head, and could hardly bear it till the Captain had gone. He did not stay long, for he took pity on Frau Sophie, who was struggling continually to hide her feet in their torn and downtrodden slippers. Herr Katschuka promised to look in again in the evening, and took his leave. He kissed Frau Sophie's hand, but made a low bow to Timéa.

Hardly was he out of the door before Timéa snatched the large comb from her hair, tore

down the heaped-up plaits, destroyed the whole edifice, then went to the basin and began to wash her hair and her whole head.

"What are you doing there, girl?" said Frau Sophie, angrily. "Will you leave off this moment! Let your hair alone. Athalie will be fine and angry when she comes home and sees you."

"Let her be angry, for all I care," answered the girl defiantly, wrung her wet locks out, sat down behind Frau Sophie, and began to put up her loosened hair into a simple threefold plait. Pride was awakened in her heart, she began to be less timid; the words of the Captain infused courage into her—his wish, his taste, were laws to her. She coiled the plait simply into a knot, and wound it round her head as he had suggested. The mistress laughed to herself: this child had been made a fool of certainly!

Whilst Timéa was plaiting her hair, Sophie came nearer and tried to wheedle her again.

"Let me tell you more about the wedding. Where did that stupid Katschuka interrupt us? If he had only known what we were talking about! Yes, I stopped where the bride and

bridegroom drink from the cup, the choir and the deacon sing 'Gospodi Pomiluj.' Then the pope reads the Gospel, and the witnesses hold the crowns over the heads of the couple. The pope receives them back, lays them on the silver dish, and says to the bridegroom, 'Be praised like Abraham, and blessed like Isaac, and increase like unto Jacob;' and to the bride, 'Be praised like Sara, happy like Rebecca, and increase like Rachel,'—and after this blessing the bride and bridegroom kiss each other three times before the altar and before the wedding-guests."

Timéa shut her eyes at the thought of the scene.

. . . . . .

Athalie was not a little surprised when she came home and saw Timéa with plaited hair.

"Who allowed you to turn up your hair? Where is your giraffe comb and your bow? Put it on at once."

Timéa pressed her lips together and shook her head.

"Will you do what I tell you instantly?"

"No."

Athalie was staggered at this resistance. It was unheard of that any one should contradict her. And this from an adopted child, who ate the bread of charity, who had always been so submissive, and once even kissed her foot. "No!" said she, going towards Timéa, and bringing her face, red with anger, as close to the other's alabaster cheek as if she would set it on fire.

Frau Sophie looked on with malicious joy from her corner, and said, "Didn't I say you would catch it when Athalie returned?"

But Timéa looked straight into Athalie's flaming eyes, and repeated her "No!"

"And why not?" screamed Athalie, whose voice was now like her mother's, while her eyes were exactly like her father's.

"Because I am prettier thus," answered Timéa.

"Who told you that?"

"He."

Athalie crooked her fingers like eagles' claws, and her teeth shone clenched between her red lips. It was as if she would tear the girl in pieces. Then her unbridled rage suddenly

turned into scornful laughter. She left Timéa and went to her room.

Herr Katschuka paid another visit the same evening. At table Athalie overwhelmed Timéa with unwonted kindness.

"Do you not think, Herr Captain, that Timéa is much prettier with her hair dressed in this simple way?"

The Captain assented. Athalie smiled. Now it was no longer a joke, but a punishment which was to be inflicted on the girl.

Only two days to the marriage. During that time Athalie overflowed with attention and tenderness to Timéa. She must not go out to the kitchen, and the servants were told to kiss her hand on entering the room. Frau Sophie often called her "little lady." The dress had come home finished, and what childlike delight it gave Timéa! She danced round it and clapped her hands.

"Come and try on your wedding costume," said Athalie, with a cruel smile.

Timéa let them put on the splendid dress she had herself embroidered. She wore no stays,

and was already well formed for her age, and the dress fitted her very fairly. With what shy pleasure she looked at herself in the great mirror! Ah! how lovely she will be in her wedding finery! Perhaps she thought, too, that she would inspire love? Perhaps she felt her heart beat; and possibly a flame was already alight there which would cause her grief and pain.

But that was no matter to those who were carrying on the shameful jest. The maid who dressed her bit her lips so as not to laugh aloud. Athalie brought out the bridal wreath, and tried it on Timéa's head. The myrtle and the white jasmine became her well.

"Oh, how beautiful you will be to-morrow!"

Then they took the dress off Timéa; and Athalie said, "Now I will try it on; I should like to see how it would suit me."

She required the help of the stays to squeeze her waist into the dress, which gave her splendid figure an even more magnificent "contour." She also put on the wreath and looked at herself in the glass. Timéa sighed deeply, and whis-

pered to Athalie, in tones of undisguised admiration, "How lovely, how lovely you are!"

It might, perhaps, have been time now to make an end of this deception. But no—she must drain the cup. First, because she is so forward; and then, because she is so stupid. She must be punished. So the contemptuous farce was carried on the whole day by all the household. The poor child's head swam with all the congratulations. She listened for Herr Katschuka, and ran away when she saw him coming.

Did he know what was going on? Quite possibly. Did it vex him? Perhaps it did not even vex him. Very likely he knew things of which the laughers did not dream, and awaited the important day with perfect indifference.

On the last morning before the marriage, Athalie said to Timéa, "To-day you must fast entirely. To-morrow is a very solemn day for you. You will be led to the altar, and there first baptised and then married; so you must fast the whole of the day before, in order to go purified to the altar."

Timéa obeyed this direction, and ate not a morsel for the entire day.

It is well known that all these adopted children have excellent appetites. Nature demands its rights; and the love of good things is the only desire which they have a chance of satisfying. But Timéa conquered that appetite. She sat at dinner and supper without touching anything, and yet they had purposely prepared her favourite dishes.

In the anteroom the maids and the cook tried to persuade her to eat secretly the delicacies which they had put aside for her, telling her she might break her fast if no one knew it. She would not be persuaded, and controlled her hunger. She helped to prepare the tarts and jellies for the wedding feast; a mass of tempting and luscious cakes lay before her, but she never touched one. And yet Athalie's example, who also was busy with the preparations for the next day, showed her that it is quite permissible to take a taste when one has a chance. She must keep her fast. She went early to bed, saying she felt chilly. And so

she was, and trembled with cold even under her quilt and could not sleep. Athalie heard her teeth chattering, and was cruel enough to whisper in her ear, "To-morrow at this time, where will you be?"

How should the poor child sleep, when all the slumbering feelings which at this age lie in the chrysalis stage were being prematurely scared into life?

Timéa lay till dawn in a fever, and slumber never closed her eyes. Towards daybreak she slept heavily; a leaden hand lay on her limbs, and even the noise which went on around her in the morning did not rouse her.

And this was the marriage-day!

Athalie ordered the servants to let Timéa sleep on; she herself let down the window curtains that the room might be dark: Timéa was only to be awoke when Athalie was already dressed in all her bridal array. That required much time, for she wished to appear to-day in the whole panoply of her beauty. From far and near numerous relations and friends had arrived to assist at the marriage of the rich

Brazovics's only daughter, the prettiest girl for seven parishes round.

The guests were already beginning to assemble in the house of the bride. Her mother, Frau Sophie, had been squeezed into her new dress, and into her even more uncomfortable new shoes, by which her desire to get the day over was much increased.

The bridegroom had also arrived, with a beaming countenance, and polite as usual; but this cheerful aspect did not mean much—it was only part of his gala uniform. He had brought the bouquet for the bride. At that time camellias were unknown; the bouquet was composed of various coloured roses. Herr Katschuka said as he presented it that he offered roses to the rose. As a reward, he received a proud smile from the radiant face.

Only two were wanting—Timéa and Herr Brazovics.

Timéa was not missed; no one asked after her. But every one waited most impatiently for Herr Brazovics. It was said that he had gone very early to the castle to see the Gover-

nor, and his return was impatiently expected. Even the bride went several times to the window and looked out for papa's carriage.

Only the bridegroom showed no anxiety. But where could Herr Brazovics be? Yesterday evening he had been in a very good temper. He had been amusing himself with his friends, and invited all his acquaintances to the wedding. Late in the night he had knocked at Herr Katschuka's window, and called to him, instead of "Good night," "The hundred thousand gulden will be all ready to-morrow." And he had good reason to be in such a merry mood. The Governor of the fortress had informed him that the plans had been accepted to their full extent by the War Department: the expropriation was arranged. Even the money had been paid for that part which lay on the ground between the two river branches; and the others concerned had received notice that this very night they would obtain the signature of the Minister. It was as good as having the money in one's pocket. The next morning, Herr Brazovics could hardly await the usual hour of reception,

and arrived so early in the antechamber of the Governor, that no one else was there. The Governor did not keep him waiting, but called him in at once.

"A little misfortune," said he.

"Well, if it is not a great one——"

"Have you ever heard of the Privy Council?"

"Never."

"Nor I. For fifteen years I never heard it spoken of. But it does exist, and has just given a sign of life. As I told you, the Minister had agreed to the execution of the fortifications and the necessary purchase of land. Then from some unknown source evidence was brought forward by which many disadvantageous circumstances were discovered. It would not do to compromise the Minister, so they called the Council together, which had not been heard of for fifteen years, except when its members drew their salary and had their band to play. The Council, when this questionable affair was submitted to it, found a wise solution: it agreed to the decision in principle, but divided its execution into two parts. The fortifications on

the river-side are to be provided for at once, but the Monostor section is only to be begun when the other is finished. So the owners of the Monostor land will have the pleasure of waiting eighteen or twenty years for their money. Good morning, Herr Brazovics."

Herr Athanas could not utter a syllable. There was no help for it. The profit so certainly counted on was gone—gone also those other hundred thousand gulden which were buried in vineyards of no value, which are now worthless. He saw all his castles in the air destroyed: his beautiful house, his cargo-ships on the Danube, the lighted church with the brilliant company, they were only a *fata morgana*, blown away with the mirage of the Monostor forts by the first puff of wind—melted into nothing, like the light cloud which obscures the sun.

. . . . . .

Ah! here comes Timéa!

At last she had had her sleep out. In the twilight of the curtained room it had taken her long to rouse herself; she dressed like one in a

feverish dream, and groped sleepily through the adjoining rooms, all empty, till she came to the one where Athalie had dressed. When she entered the bright room full of flowers and presents, she remembered for the first time that this was her wedding-day.

When she saw Herr Katschuka with the bouquet in his hand, the thought shot across her that this was the bridegroom; and when she cast a glance on Athalie she thought, "That is my wedding-dress." As she stood there in her astonishment, with wide eyes and open mouth, she was a sight for laughing and weeping.

The servants, the guests, Frau Sophie, could not contain their merriment.

But Athalie stepped forward majestically, took hold of the little thing's delicate chin with her white-gloved hand, and said, smiling, "To-day, my little treasure, you must allow me to be the one to go to the altar. You, my child, must go to school and wait five years before you are married, if indeed any one proposes to you."

Timéa stood as if petrified, and let her folded hands fall into her lap. She did not blush or become paler. There was no name for what she felt.

Perhaps Athalie knew that this cruel jest was not calculated to enhance her charms, and tried to lessen its effect. "Come, Timéa," she said; "I only waited for you. Come and put on my veil."

The bridal veil!

Timéa took the veil with stiffened fingers, and went towards Athalie. It was to be fastened to her hair with a golden arrow.

Timéa's hand trembled, and the arrow was heavy: it would not go through the thick hair. At an impatient movement of Athalie's, its blunt point pricked the lovely bride's head slightly.

"You are too stupid for anything!" cried Athalie angrily, and struck Timéa on the hand. Her eyebrows contracted. Scolded, struck, on such a day, and in the presence of that man! Two heavy drops formed in her eyes and rolled down her white cheek. I trow those two drops

turned the scale held by the Great Judge's hand, from which happiness and misery are measured out to man.

Athalie tried to excuse her hastiness by her feverish excitement. A bride may be pardoned if she is nervous and irritable at the last moment. The witnesses, the bridesmaids, are ready, and the bride's father has not yet arrived.

Every one was uneasy; only the bridegroom was quite composed. A message had come from the church that the pope was ready and waiting for the bridal pair. Already the bells are ringing, as is the custom at grand weddings. Athalie's heart beats high with vexation that her father does not come. One messenger after another is sent for him. At last his glass coach is seen approaching. Here he is at last!

The bride steps up to the mirror once more, to see if her veil falls in the right folds. She puts her bracelets and necklace straight.

Meanwhile a curious sound is heard below, as if many people were rushing up-stairs together. Mysterious noises and smothered exclamations

are heard in the next room; every one presses thither; the bridesmaids and friends run out to see what it is; but it is remarkable that none of them return.

Athalie hears her mother scream. Well, she generally screams even when she is talking quietly.

"Do see what has happened," says Athalie to her bridegroom.

The Captain goes out, and Athalie remains alone with Timéa; the suppressed whispering grows louder. At last even Athalie becomes uneasy.

The bridegroom returns. He remains standing at the open door, and says thence to his bride, "Herr Brazovics is dead."

The bride throws her arms into the air and falls swooning backwards. If Timéa had not caught her in her arms, she would have struck her head on the marble table behind her. The lovely haughty face of the bride is whiter even than Timéa's; and Timéa, whilst she holds Athalie's head on her breast, thinks, "See how the beautiful wedding-dress lies in the dust!"

The bridegroom stands at the door and looks long at Timéa, then turning away suddenly, he leaves the house amidst the universal confusion.

He does not even take the trouble to lift his bride from the ground.

CHAPTER VIII.

TIMÉA.

"How the beautiful dress lies in the dust!"

Instead of the wedding feast there followed the funeral banquet, and in the place of the embroidered robe came the mourning garments.

Black! The colour which makes rich and poor alike.

Athalie and Timéa were dressed alike in black. And if the mourning had consisted only in the wearing of its outward garb! But with the sudden death of Herr Athanas all the birds of ill omen had collected, as the ravens come and sit in long lines on the roof before a great storm.

The first croak was, that the bridegroom sent back his engagement-ring. He did not appear

at the funeral to lend his bride a supporting arm as she followed the coffin half-fainting; for in this little town it was the custom that the mourners, whether gentle or simple, should follow their dead on foot and with bare heads to the burial-ground.

There were some who blamed this course of action in Katschuka, and did not consider it an excuse that, as Herr Brazovics had not kept to the condition of handing over the dowry beforehand, the bridegroom was justified in considering himself freed from his obligations. There are a few narrow-minded people who can find no excuse for such a withdrawal. Then came the ravens and sat on the roof. One creditor after another appeared and demanded his money. And then the whole house of cards collapsed.

The first who spoke of a suit at law blew the concern into the air. When once the avalanche begins to roll, it never stops till it gets to the foot of the hill.

It was soon ascertained that the fears of the bridegroom, who had got safely away, were only too well founded. In the affairs of Herr Bra-

zovics there figured so many investments apparently sound but really unprofitable, such false calculations, unsecured debts, and imaginary securities, that when order was brought into this chaos, the whole property did not suffice to satisfy the creditors. Besides, it came to light that he had used moneys entrusted to his honour: orphans' capital, church endowments, hospital funds, the deposits of his ship-captains. The floods rose over the roof of the house, and these floods brought mire and dirt with them; and what they left behind was—shame.

Timéa too lost her whole property. The orphan's trust-money had never been invested at all.

Every day lawyers, magistrates' clerks, bailiffs, came to the house. They sealed each box and closet; they did not ask the ladies for permission to visit them; unannounced they bounced in at any hour of the day, ransacked the rooms, and gave vent to reproaches and curses on the dead man, so loud that the mourning women could not but hear them. All they found in the house was taken out in turn and appraised,

down to the pictures, with and without their frames; even the wedding-dress, without a bride, did not escape this fate. And then they decided on the date, and had it posted on the door, on which everything was to be sold by auction—everything, not excepting the embroidered dress. The last lot would be the house itself; and when it was sold the former owners could go their way wheresoever they chose, and the beautiful Athalie might look up to heaven and ask where she was henceforth to lay her haughty head. Where indeed?—she, the orphaned daughter of a fraudulent bankrupt, to whom not even her good name was left, whom no one wanted, not even herself. Of all the treasures she possessed, only two valuable souvenirs remained which she had hidden from the bailiffs—an onyx box, and the returned engagement-ring. The box she had concealed in her pocket; and when alone at night, she drew it out and looked at its precious contents. There were all sorts of poison in it. By some odd freak, Athalie had bought it in one of her Italian journeys, and while it was in her posses-

sion she thought she could defy the world. She imagined herself able to destroy her own life at any moment, and this idea made her feel as a despot to her parents and her lover. If they do not do all she wishes, the box is there; she need only choose the swiftest poison, and in the morning they would find her a corpse. Now a great temptation assailed her; life lay before her as a desolate waste; the father had made his child a beggar, and the bridegroom had forsaken his bride.

Athalie rose from her bed: she looked into the open box, and sought amongst the various poisons.

Then she suddenly discovered that she was afraid of death! She had not strength to cast life away; she gazed at herself in the glass—was all that beauty to be annihilated?

She shut the box and put it away. Then she brought out the other jewel, the ring. There is a poison in that too, and of a yet more deadly sort, for it kills the soul. But she has the courage to swallow it—to intoxicate herself with it. She had loved the man who

gave her this ring—not only so, but she was still madly in love with him. The poison-box gives bad advice—the ring even worse. Athalie begins to dress; there is no one to help her —the servants have all left the house, Frau Sophie and Timéa are sleeping in the maids' room; the official seal has been attached to the doors of the public apartments. Athalie does not wake the sleepers, but dresses alone. How far the night has passed she cannot tell; no one winds up the splendid clocks, now that they are to pass under the hammer. One points to eight o'clock, another to three, but it does not matter. Athalie finds the key of the street-door and creeps out, leaving all open behind her. Who is likely to be robbed? and besides, who would, like her, venture alone in the dark streets?

At that time the streets of Komorn were decidedly dark at night. One lamp at the Trinity-pillar, one at the town-hall, and a third at the main guard,—no others anywhere. Athalie takes the road to the Promenade, the so-called "Anglia." It is a region of evil reputation.

A dark lane between the town and the fort, in which at night fallen women with painted faces and dishevelled hair loiter, when they are driven from their haunts on the "little square." Athalie is sure to meet such creatures if she goes by the Anglia. But she is not afraid. The poison she sucked out of the golden ring has taken away her fear of these impure forms. One only shrinks from the gutter as long as one has kept clear of it.

At the corner stands a sentry; she must try to creep past him without being seen and challenged.

The corner house has a colonnade leading to the square. Here in the day-time the bread-sellers have their stand. Athalie chooses her path through this arcade, as it hides her from the sentry's eyes.

In walking quickly she stumbled over something. It was a ragged woman, quite drunk, lying across the threshold. The half-human creature whom her foot touched gave vent to filthy curses. Athalie took no notice, but stepped aside from the obstacle; she felt easier

when she turned the corner towards the Promenade. The light of the main-guard lamp had now disappeared, and she found herself under the gloom of the trees. Through the juniper-bushes shone a ray from a lighted window. Athalie followed that guiding star. There lay the dwelling of the Engineer officer. She seized the lion-headed knocker at the little door, over which was painted the double eagle; her hand trembled as she raised it in order to knock gently, and at the sound the soldier-servant came out and opened to her.

"Is the Captain in?" asked Athalie.

The fellow nodded, grinning. Yes—he was at home. He had often seen Athalie, and many a pretty bright coin had rolled into his hand from her delicate fingers, when he carried the beautiful lady flowers or choice fruit from his master.

The Captain was up and at work; his room was simply furnished, without any luxury. On the walls hung maps and surveying-instruments; the strictest military simplicity surprised the in-comer, as well as a penetrating

smell of tobacco, which adhered to the books and furniture, and was perceptible even when no one was smoking. Athalie had never seen the Captain's room. The house to which he was to have taken her on their marriage-day was very different, but it had been taken possession of by the creditors with all its contents on that very morning. She had only looked in at the window when she walked with her mother on the Promenade in the afternoon to hear the band play.

Herr Katschuka started up in alarm. He was not prepared for a lady's visit; the three top buttons of his violet tunic were unbuttoned, contrary to regulations, and he had laid aside his horse-hair cravat. Athalie remained standing at the door with hanging arms and her head down: the Captain hastened to her.

"In God's name, Fräulein, what are you doing here? What are you here for?" She could not speak,—she sank on his breast and sobbed wildly. He did not embrace her. "Sit down, Fräulein," said he, leading her to the plain leather sofa, and then his first care was

to put on his cravat again. He drew a chair near the divan and sat down opposite Athalie. "What do you want, Fräulein?"

She dried her tears and looked with her radiant eyes long at the Captain, as if thus to tell him why she came. Will he not understand?

No, he understood nothing. When she was obliged to break silence, she began to tremble as if with ague.

"Sir," she said, with a quivering voice, "as long as I was prosperous, you were very devoted to me. Is nothing left of that affection?"

"Fräulein," answered Katschuka, with cold politeness, "I shall always be your devoted friend. The blow which fell on you struck me too—we have both lost our all. I am in despair, for I see no means of resuscitating my hopes reduced to ashes. My profession imposes conditions on me which I cannot fulfil: it is not allowed to those of us who have no private means to marry."

"I know it," said Athalie, "and it was not that which I wished to suggest to you. We are now very poor, but there may be some favour-

able turn in our lot. My father has a rich uncle in Belgrade whose heirs we are; at his death we shall be rich again. I will wait for you—do you wait for me. Take back your ring—take me to your mother, and let me stay with her as your betrothed. I will wait for you till you fetch me away, and will be a good daughter to your mother."

Herr Katschuka sighed so deeply that he nearly blew out the light which stood before him. "Alas, Fräulein," said he, taking up the golden circle from the table, "that is, unhappily, quite impossible. You little know my mother. She is an ambitious woman — an inaccessible nature. She lives on a small pension, and loves no one. You have no idea what struggles I have had with my mother about my *affaires du cœur*. She is a baroness by birth, and has never consented to this union. She would not come to our marriage. I could not take you to her, Fräulein — on your account I have quarrelled with her."

Athalie's breast heaved feverishly, her face glowed; she seized with both her hands that of

her faithless bridegroom, on which the ring was wanting, and whispered, whilst tears ran down her cheeks, so low that even the deaf walls could not hear, "You—you have braved your mother for me; I will defy the whole world for you."

Katschuka dared not meet the speaking eyes of the lovely woman. He drew geometrical figures on the table with the golden circle he still held, as if he would decipher from their angles of incidence the difference between love and madness.

The girl continued in a whisper, "I am already so deeply humiliated that no shame can bring me lower; I have no more to lose in this world. If you were not here, I should have already killed myself. I belong not to myself, but to you,—say, what shall I be to you? I have lost my senses, and all is the same to me; kill me, if you choose—I will not stir."

Herr Katschuka, during this passionate speech, had worked out the problem of what he was to answer. "Fräulein Athalie! I will

speak frankly — you know I am an honest man."

Athalie had not asked him about that.

"An honest and chivalrous man would be ashamed to take advantage of the misfortune of a woman for the satisfaction of his lowest passions. I will give you good advice as a well-meaning friend, as one who has a boundless respect for you. You tell me you have an uncle in Belgrade: go to him. He is your blood-relation, and must receive you in a friendly way. I give you my word of honour that I will not marry, and if we meet again I shall always bring you the same feelings which for years I have experienced towards you."

He told no lie when he gave this promise. But from what his face showed at this moment, Athalie could read what he did not say,—that the Captain neither now nor for years past had loved her, that he loved another, and if this other was poor and made a beggar, he had good reason to promise on his word of honour that he would not marry. This it was which Athalie read in the cool expressions of her faithless

bridegroom. And then something flashed through her brain like lightning. Her eyes flashed too.

"Will you come to-morrow," she asked him, "to escort me to my uncle in Belgrade?"

"I will come," Katschuka hastened to reply. "But now go home. Did any one come with you?"

"I came quite alone."

"What imprudence! Who is to take you back?"

"You need not," she said, bitterly. "If at this hour any one saw us together, what a scandal it would be—for you. I can walk alone. I am not afraid. I have no longer anything worth stealing."

"My servant shall follow you."

"He shall do nothing of the sort. The patrol might arrest the poor devil. After the last post he must not be seen in the streets. I will find my way alone. So then—to-morrow——"

"I will be with you by eight o'clock."

Athalie wrapped herself in her black cloak, and hurried away before Katschuka had time

to open the door for her. It seemed to her as if the Captain was putting on his sword almost before she had left his door. Is he perhaps going to follow her in the distance?

She stopped at the corner of the Anglia, but no one was following. She ran home in the darkness, and as she hastened through the deep night she concocted a plan in her head. If only the Captain once sits by her in the carriage, if he goes with her to Belgrade, he will see that no power on earth can deliver him from her. As she passed through the long market-hall, she stumbled again over the same female figure as it lay on the stones. This time it did not awake nor curse her. What sound sleep these wretches enjoy! But when Athalie got to the door of her home, a thought sank like lead into her mind. What if the Captain was only so ready with his promise of escorting her to Belgrade in order to get rid of her? What if he does not come to-morrow, either at eight or later? A torturing jealousy excited her nerves. When she reached the anteroom, she felt about on the table for the candle and matches she had

left there. Instead of these her hand touched a knife—a sharp cook's knife with a heavy handle. This also sheds light on darkness. She grasped the knife and walked up and down. Her teeth chattered: the thought was working in her, how if she were to drive this knife into the heart of that girl with the white face, who sleeps beside her? That would be an end of them both. They would convict her of the murder, and so she would get out of the world.

But Timéa is not sleeping there now.

Athalie only remembered when she had gone to the bed in which Timéa usually slept, that she was sleeping with Frau Sophie to-night. The knife fell from her hand, and then she was frightened. She began to feel how lonely she was, how dark was all around her, dark too in her own soul.

. . . . . .

The roll of a drum awoke Athalie out of a distressing dream. She dreamt of a young lady who had murdered her rival, and was led to the place of execution. Already she knelt on the scaffold, the headsman with his naked

sword stood behind her, the judge read the sentence and said, "With God there is pardon." The drum beat, then Athalie awoke.

It was the auctioneer's drum. The bidding had begun; but that drum is even more dreadful than the one which gives the signal of death. To listen, when the voice which penetrates even to the street calls out the well-known, old favourite things which only yesterday were our own! "Once, twice; any advance?" and then "thrice!" and the drum rolls and the hammer falls. Then it begins again, "Once, twice; any advance?"

Athalie put on her mourning dress, the only one left to her, and went to find some one. There were only her mother and Timéa to look for. They would probably be in the kitchen.

Both had long been up and dressed. Frau Sophie was as round as a tub. Knowing well enough that no one would search her, she had put on a dozen dresses one over the other, and hidden a few napkins and silver spoons in her pockets. She could hardly move. Timéa was in her simple black everyday dress, and was

preparing warm milk and coffee. At the sight of Athalie, Frau Sophie broke into loud sobs, and hung on her neck. "Oh, my dear, darling, pretty daughter! What have we come to, and what will become of us? Oh that we had not lived to see this day! This dreadful drum woke you, I suppose?"

"Is it not yet eight o'clock?" asked Athalie. The kitchen clock was still going.

"Not eight? Why, the auction began at nine. Can you not hear it?"

"Has no one been to see us?"

"Silly idea! Why, who should visit us at such a time?"

Athalie said no more, but sat down on the bench — the same little seat on which Frau Sophie had described to Timéa the splendid wedding ceremony.

Timéa prepared the breakfast, toasted the bread, and laid the kitchen table for the two ladies. Athalie did not heed the invitation, however much pressed by Frau Sophie. "Drink, my dear, my own pretty! Who knows where we shall get coffee to-morrow!

The whole world is against us, and every one abuses and curses us. What will become of us?" But that did not hinder her from gulping down her cup of coffee. Athalie was thinking of the journey to Belgrade, and of her expected travelling companion.

Frau Sophie's mind was much occupied with original notions on easy modes of death. "If there were only a pin in the coffee that it might stick in my throat and choke me." Then the wish arose that the flat-iron would fall down from the shelf as she passed and crush her skull. She would be glad, too, if one of the earthquakes which occasionally occur in Komorn would happen now, and bury the house and all in it. As, however, none of these ways of dying came to pass, and Athalie would not speak, there was nothing left but to vent her wrath on Timéa. "She takes it easily, the ungrateful creature! She is not even crying; indeed it is easy for her to laugh—she can go to service, or work with a milliner and keep herself; she will be glad to be quit of us, and live on her own hook. You just wait, you will

soon have to remember us. You'll be sorry—before a year is over you'll repent fast enough." Timéa had done nothing to repent of, but Frau Sophie saw it in the future, and her anger was only surpassed by the grief she felt about Athalie. "What will become of you, you sweet and only darling? Who will take care of you? What will become of your pretty white hands?"

"There, go and leave me in peace," said Athalie, shaking her lamenting mother off her neck. "Go and look out of the window, and see if any one is coming up to us."

"Nobody, nobody!—who should be coming?"

Time went on; drum and bid succeeded each other; whenever the kitchen clock struck, Athalie started up, and then let her head fall into her hands again and stared before her. The roses on her cheeks took a violet shade, her lips were blue, an olive shadow darkened her exquisite face; her staring eyes, with deep marks below them, her swollen lips, her painfully contracted eyebrows, turned the ideal beauty into an image of horror. She sat like a fallen

angel driven from heaven. It was already noon, and he for whom she waited never came. The noise of the sale came nearer and nearer. The auctioneer went from room to room; they had begun in the outer rooms, now they were coming to the reception-rooms, at whose far end was the kitchen.

Frau Sophie, in spite of her despair, had her senses about her enough to notice that the bidding was very quick. Hardly was anything put up before the drum beat, and "any advance?" was cried. The buyers standing in groups complained, "No one has a chance,—the man is mad. Who can this fool be?"

Now only the kitchen department is left, but no one enters it. Outside, the drum is heard, "No one will give more?" It has been bought as a whole, unseen—by some fool.

It struck Frau Sophie, too, that people did not hasten to fetch the lots they bought out of the rooms, as usual at an auction: here nothing is touched. Now comes the principal lot, and every one goes down to the yard, for the house itself is being put up. The buyers press round

the table of the official auctioneer; the upset price is named. Then some one makes an offer in a low voice—— Amongst the crowd arises a confused noise, tones of astonishment, laughter, hissing; the people scatter, and again one hears, "He must be a fool." Grumbling and angry, all go away. "Once, twice, thrice!" the hammer falls. The house has found a purchaser.

"Now it's time to go, my sweet darling daughter. We will look out for the last time. If only the tower of St John's church would fall and crush us all together!" But Athalie sat on the bench, waiting and waiting, and looking at the clock. It points to two. One little ray of hope still shone through the Egyptian darkness—perhaps it was the dread of pushing through the crowd of bidders which had kept the Captain from coming; perhaps he will appear as soon as the yard is clear.

"Don't you hear some one coming?"

"No, my beauty, I hear nothing."

"Yes, mother, I hear some one creeping upstairs gently, on tiptoe."

In truth soft steps approach. Some one knocks at the kitchen door, like a polite visitor who begs permission to enter, and waits till it is given him; and then the door opens gently, and in comes, with hat off, and courteous bow—Michael Timar Levetinczy. He remained standing near the door after saluting the ladies. Athalie rose with an expression of disappointment and hatred; Frau Sophie wrung her hands, and looked up with a mixture of hope and fear; Timéa met his gaze with gentle calmness.

"I," began Timar, sending his "I" in advance like a Pope in his bull,—"I have had this house and all its saleable contents knocked down to me at the auction. I did not buy it for myself, but for the one person in it who is not to be bought, and yet is the only treasure on earth in my sight. . . . Fräulein Timéa, from this day forward you are the mistress of this house. Everything in it belongs to you—the clothes, the jewels in the wardrobes, the horses in the stable, the securities in the safe, just as they were found by the official sequestrator—all is inscribed in your name, and the creditors are

satisfied. You are the owner of the house—accept it from me; and if there is a corner in it where there is room for a quiet fellow who would only impose on you his respect and admiration, and if this corner could be given to me—if there was a little shelter for me in your heart, and you did not refuse my hand—then I should be only too happy, and would swear that the whole aim of my life would be to make you as happy as you made me."

Timéa's face beamed at these words with maidenly pride. A mixture of inexpressible pain, noble gratitude, and holy sacrifice lighted up her countenance. "Thrice, thrice," her lips stammered, but without a sound, only her sympathetic nerves heard what she wanted to utter. This man had so often saved her; he was always so good to her; he had never made sport of her, nor flattered her, and now he gives her all her heart could desire. All? No, all but one thing, and that is gone; it belongs to another.

Timar waited quietly for an answer. Timéa remained silent.

"Do not answer hastily, Fräulein Timéa," he

said. "I will await your decision. I will come to-morrow, or in a week, or whenever you like to give me an answer. You are mistress of all I have handed over to you; I attach no conditions to it; it is all registered in your name. If you do not wish to see me here again, it only costs you one word; take a week or a month or a year to consider what you will answer."

Timéa stepped forward with decision from behind the stove where the other two women had pushed her, and approached Michael.

In her manner lay a precocious gravity, which lent to her face a womanly dignity. Since that eventful wedding-day she had ceased to be a child; she had become serious and silent. She looked calmly into Michael's face, and said, "I have already decided."

Frau Sophie listened with envious malice for Timéa's answer. If only she would say to Timar, "I don't want you—go away!" Anything is possible from such an idiot of a girl, who has had another man put in her head. And if Timar, just to revenge himself, were to say, "Well then, stay as you are; you shall have

neither the house nor my hand, I will offer both to Fräulein Athalie,"—and if he were to marry Athalie! As if cases had not been heard of in which an honest lover was refused by some stuck-up girl, and then out of pique offered his hand to the governess, or proposed to the housemaid on the spot! This hope of Frau Sophie's, however, was not destined to be fulfilled.

Timéa gave her hand to Timar, and said in a low but firm voice, "I accept you as my husband."

Michael grasped the offered hand—not with the fire of a passionate lover, but with the homage of a man, and looked long into the unearthly beauty of the girl's eyes.

And the girl allowed him to read her soul. She repeated her words: "I accept you as my husband, and will be a faithful and obedient wife; I only ask one favour—you will not refuse me?" Happiness made Michael forget that a merchant should never sign his name to a blank sheet of paper. "Oh, speak! what you desire is already done."

"My request is," said Timéa, "if you take me to wife, and this house becomes yours again, and I the mistress in your house, that you should allow my adopted mother who received me, an orphan, and my adopted sister with whom I have grown up, to remain here with me. Regard them as my mother and sister, and treat them as kindly."

An involuntary tear fell from Timar's eye. Timéa noticed it, seized his right hand with both hers, and made a new attack on his heart. "You will, I know you will do as I ask you; and you will give back to Athalie all that was hers?—her nice clothes and jewels; and she will stay with us, and you will be the same to her as if she were my own sister; and you will treat Mama Sophie as I do, and call her mother?"

Frau Sophie hearing this began to sob aloud. She sank on her knees before Timéa, and covered her hands, her dress, even her feet with unceasing kisses, whilst she murmured broken and inaudible words.

In the next moment Timar was himself again,

and the far-seeing vision came to his aid, which at any critical time raised him above his rivals. His quick invention whispered to him what must be done to provide against future complications. He took Timéa's little hands in his. "You are a noble creature, Timéa. You will permit me henceforward to call you by your name? and I will not disgrace your good heart. Stand up, Mama Sophie, do not cry; tell Athalie she might come nearer to me. I will do more than Timéa asked, for love of her, and for you two: I will provide for Athalie not only a place of refuge, but a happy home of her own; I will pay the deposit for her bridegroom, and give her the dowry which her father had promised to her. May they be happy together."

Timar had foreseen things still below the horizon, and thought that no sacrifice would be too great to get the two women out of the house and away from Timéa, and to manage that the handsome Captain should be married to the lovely Athalie.

But now it was his turn to be overwhelmed with kisses and gratitude by Frau Sophie.

"Oh, Herr von Levetinczy! Oh, dear, generous Herr von Levetinczy! let me kiss your hand, your feet, your clever head." And she did as set forth in her programme, and kissed besides his shoulders, coat-collar, and his back, at last embracing both Timar and Timéa in her arms, and bestowing her valuable blessing upon them. "Be happy together!"

It was impossible to help laughing at the way the poor woman expressed her joy. But Athalie poisoned all their pleasure.

Proud as a fallen angel who is asked to return, and who prefers damnation to humbling her pride, she turned away from Timar, and said in a voice choked with passion, "I thank you, sir. But I never wish to hear of Herr Katschuka again, either in this world or the next! I will never be his wife; I will remain here with Timéa—as her servant."

BOOK THIRD

THE OWNERLESS ISLAND

CHAPTER I.

THE MARRIAGE OF THE MARBLE STATUE.

TIMAR was intensely happy at being engaged to Timéa.

The unearthly beauty of the girl had captivated his heart at first sight. He admired her then, and afterwards the sweet nature which he learnt to appreciate won his respect. The shameful trick played on her in the house of Brazovics awoke in him a chivalrous sympathy. The airy courtship of the Captain aroused his jealousy; all these were symptoms of love, and at last he had reached the goal of his wishes: the lovely maiden was his, and would be his wife.

And a great burden was lifted from his soul —self-reproach; for from the day when Timar

found the treasures of Ali Tschorbadschi in the sunken ship, his peace was gone. After each brilliant success of any of his undertakings, the voice of the accuser arose in his breast: "This does not belong to you—it was the property of an orphan which you usurped. You a lucky man? You a man of gold? It is not true! Benefactor of the poor? Not true! Not true! You are a thief!"

Now the suit is decided. The inward judge acquits him. The defrauded orphan receives back her property, and in double measure, for whatever belongs to her husband is hers too. She will never know that the foundation of this great fortune was once hers; she only knows it is hers now—thus fate is reconciled.

But is it really reconciled? Timar forgot the sophism that he offered Timéa something besides the treasures which were hers—himself—and in exchange demanded the girl's heart, and that this was a deception, and like taking her by force.

He wished to hasten the wedding. There was no need of delay on account of the trousseau, for

he had bought everything in Vienna. Timéa's wedding-dress was made by the best Parisian house, and the bride was not obliged to work at it herself for six weeks, as at that other. That doubly unlucky dress was buried in a closet which no one ever opened; it would never be brought out again.

But other hindrances of an ecclesiastical nature presented themselves—Timéa was still unbaptised. It was only natural that Timar should wish Timéa, when she left the Moslem faith for Christianity, to enter at once the Protestant church to which he belonged, so that they might worship together after their marriage. But then the Protestant minister announced it as an indispensable condition of conversion, that neophytes should be instructed in the creed of that Church into which they were to be received. Here a great difficulty arose. The Mahomedan religion has nothing to say to women in its dogmas. To a Moslem a woman is no more than a flower which fades and falls, whose soul is its fragrance, which the wind carries away, and it is gone. Timéa had no creed.

The very reverend gentleman found his task by no means easy when he tried to convince Timéa of the superiority of the Christian religion. He had converted Jews and Papists, but he had never tried it with a Turkish girl.

On the first day, when the minister was explaining the splendours of the other world, and declaring that there all who in this world had loved each other would be reunited, the girl put this question to him—"Would those meet who had loved each other, or only those whom the minister had united?" This was a ticklish question; but the reverend gentleman answered, from his own puritanical point of view, that only those could possibly love each other who were united by the Church, and that it was of course impossible for those who were thus united *not* to love each other. But he was careful not to repeat this question to Herr Timar.

The next day Timéa asked him whether her father, Ali Tschorbadschi, would also arrive in that world to which she was going?

To this delicate question the minister was unable to give a satisfactory reply.

"But is it not the case that I shall there still be the wife of Herr Levetinczy?" asked Timéa, with lively curiosity. To this the Herr Pastor was glad to reply, with gracious readiness, that that would certainly be the case.

"Well, then, I shall ask Herr Levetinczy, when we both go to heaven, to keep a little place for my father, that he may be with us; and surely he will not refuse me?"

The reverend gentleman scratched his ear violently, and thought he had better lay this difficult point before the Church Synod.

The third day he said to Timar that it would be best to baptise and marry the young lady at once: then her husband could give her instruction in the other dogmas.

The next Sunday the sacred rite was celebrated. Timéa then for the first time entered a Protestant church. The simple building, with its whitewashed walls and unornamented chancel, made a very different impression on her mind from that other church, out of which the naughty boys had chased her when she peeped in. There were golden altars, great wax tapers

burning in silver candelabra, pictures, incense filling the air, mysterious chants, and people sinking on their knees at the sound of a bell. Here sat long rows of men and women apart, each with their book before them, and after the precentor had set the tune, all the congregation joined in unison. Then silence, and the minister mounted the high pulpit and began to preach without any ceremony. He did not sing, nor drink from the chalice, nor show any holy relics—only talk, talk on.

Timéa sat in the first row with her sponsors, who led her to the font, where another long sermon was preached. At last it was over; the neophyte bowed her head over the basin, and the minister baptised her, in the name of the Trinity, "Susanna." She wondered why she should be called Susanna, as she was quite satisfied with her own name.

Then they all sat down again and sang the eighty-third Psalm, "O God of Israel," which awoke in Timéa a slight doubt as to whether she had not been turned into a Jewess.

All her doubts vanished, however, when an-

other minister arose, and read from the chancel a document which set forth that the noble Herr Michael Timar von Levetinczy, of the Swiss Protestant Church, had betrothed himself to Fräulein Timéa Susanna von Tschorbadschi, also of the Swiss Protestant religion.

Two more weeks must pass before the marriage. Michael spent every day with Timéa. The girl always received him with frank cordiality, and he was happy in his anticipations of the future. He generally found Athalie with his bride, but she made some pretext for leaving the room, and her mother took her place.

Mama Sophie entertained Michael with praises of his bride—what a dear girl she was, and how often she spoke of her kind good Michael, who had taken such care of her on board the St Barbara. Sophie had heard every little detail, which only Timéa could have known, and Michael was delighted to find that she remembered so well.

"If you only knew, dear Levetinczy, how fond the girl is of you!" And Timéa was not confused when she heard Frau Sophie say this.

She affected no modest contradiction, but did not strengthen the assurance by any shy blushes. She allowed Timar to hold her hand in his and look into her eyes, and when he came and went she smiled at him.

At last the wedding-day arrived. Troops of guests streamed in from all parts, a long row of carriages stood in the street, as on that other ill-omened day; but this time no misfortune occurred.

The bridegroom fetched the bride out of the house of Brazovics, which was now her own, and took her to the church, but the wedding banquet was in the bridegroom's house. Frau Sophie would not be denied the task of arranging everything. Athalie remained at home and looked from behind the curtain, through the same window at which she had awaited the arrival of her own bridegroom, while the long row of carriages was set in motion.

And there she waited till they all went past again after the marriage, bride and bridegroom now in the same carriage, and looked after them. And if during this time the whole congrega-

tion had prayed for the young couple, we may be sure that she also sent a—prayer—after them.

Timéa had not found the ceremony as impressive as Frau Sophie had described it to her. The clergyman did not wear a golden robe or mitre himself, nor did he bring out any silver crowns to crown them as lord or lady to each other. The bridegroom wore a velvet coat, as nobles did then, with agraffes and fur on it. He looked a fine man, but he held his head down: he was not yet used to carry it proudly, as beseems the gala suit of a noble. There was no veil wound round the two, no drinking from the same cup, no procession round the altar and holy kiss, not even any altar at all; only a black-robed minister, who said wise things no doubt, but which had not the mysterious charm of the "Gospodi Pomiluj." The Protestant marriage, deprived of all ceremony, leaves the oriental fancy, with its desire for excitement, quite cold. And Timéa only understood the external ceremony as yet.

The brilliant banquet came to an end; the

guests went away, the bride remained in the bridegroom's house.

When Timar was alone with Timéa, when he sat by her side and took her hand, he felt his heart beat and its pulsation spread through his whole frame. . . . The unspeakable treasure which was the goal of all his desires is in his possession. He has only to stretch out his arm and draw her to his breast. He dares not do it—he is as if bound by a spell. The wife, the baroness, does not shrink at his approach. She does not tremble or glow. If only she would cast her eyes down in alarm when Michael's hand touched her shoulder! If only the warm reflex of a shy blush passed over her pale face, the spell would be broken. But she remains as calm and cold and passionless as a somnambulist. Michael sees before him the same figure which he awoke from death on that eventful night—the same which lay on the bed before him like an altar-picture which radiates cold to the spectator, and whose face never changed when her night-dress slipped from her shoulders, nor even when told that

her father was dead—not even when Timar whispered into her ear, "Beloved!"

She is a marble statue—a statue which bows, dresses itself, submits, but is not alive. She sees, but her glance neither encourages nor alarms. He can do what he likes with her. She allows him to let down her lovely bright hair, and spread the locks over her shoulders; she allows his lips to approach her white face, and his hot breath to touch her cheek; but it kindles no responsive warmth in her. Michael thinks if he were to press the icy form to his breast, the charm would be broken; but in the act of doing it, an even greater emotion overcomes him. He starts back as if he was about to commit a crime against which nature, his guardian angel, every sensitive nerve in him, protested. "Timéa," he whispered to her in caressing murmurs, "do you know that you are my wife?"

Timéa looked at him and answered, "Yes, I know it."

"Do you love me?"

Then she opened wide her large dark eyes, and

as he looked into them it seemed to him as if he were granted a glimpse into all the mysteries of the starry heavens. Then she veils them again with her silky lashes.

"Do you feel no love for me?" entreats the husband with a yearning sigh.

That look again, and the pale woman asks, "What is love?"

What is love? All the wise men in the world could not explain it to one who does not feel it. But it requires no explanation for those who have it within them.

"Oh, you child!" sighed Timar, and rose from his wife's side.

Timéa rose also. "No, sir, I am no longer a child. I know what I am—your wife. I have sworn it to you, and God has heard my vow. I will be a faithful and obedient wife to you—it is appointed to me by fate. You have shown me so much kindness, that I owe you a lifelong gratitude. You are my lord and master, and I will always do what you wish and order."

Michael turned away and covered his face. This look of self-sacrifice and abnegation froze

all desire in his veins. Who would have the courage to press a martyr to his heart, the statue of a saint, with palm-branches and crown of thorns?

"I will do what you command."

Michael now first began to guess what a hollow victory he had won. He had married a marble statue.

CHAPTER II.

THE GUARDIAN DEVIL.

It has often happened that a man has found his wife's heart to be devoid of all inclination towards him.

And no doubt many have looked for a cure in course of time. What can one do in winter, except look forward to spring? As the daughter of Mahomedan parents, Timéa had been brought up not to see the face of the man who was to be her husband until the wedding-day. There no one asks, "Do you, or do you not, love him?" neither her parents, the priest, nor the man himself. The husband will be good to her, and if he should find her out in infidelity he will kill her. The principal thing is that she should have a pretty face, bright eyes, fine

hair, and a sweet breath—no one asks about her heart. But Timéa had learnt in a different school in the house of Brazovics. There she learned that amongst the Christians love was allowed, and every opportunity given for it; but that any one who did fall in love was not cured like a sick person, but punished like a criminal. She had expiated her crime.

When Timéa became Timar's wife, she had schooled herself strictly, and forbidden every drop of her blood to speak to her of anything except her duties as a wife; for if she had allowed them to talk of her secret fancies, then each drop of blood would have persuaded her to go the same road on which that other girl had twice, in the darkness of the night, stumbled over the body of the sleeping woman, and that stumble would have killed her soul. She crushed and buried the feeling, and gave her hand to a man whom she respected, to whom she owed gratitude, and whose life-companion she was to remain.

This story is repeated every day. And those who meet with it console themselves with the

idea that soon the spring will come and the ice will melt.

Michael went with his young wife to travel, and visited Italy and Switzerland. They returned as they went. Neither the romantic Alpine valleys nor the fragrant orange-groves brought balm to his heart. He overwhelmed his wife with all that women like, dress and jewels; he introduced her to the gaieties of great cities. All in vain: moonlight gives no heat, even through a burning glass. His wife was gentle, attentive, grateful, obedient; but her heart was never open to him, neither at home nor abroad, neither in joy nor sorrow. Her heart was buried.

Timar had married a corpse.

With this knowledge he returned from his travels. At one time he thought of leaving Komorn and settling in Vienna. Perhaps a new life might begin there. But then he thought of another plan: he decided to remain in Komorn and move into the Brazovics house. There he would live with his wife, and arrange his own house as an office, so that business

people might have nothing to do with the house his wife lived in. In this way he could be absent from home all day, without its being noticed that he left his wife alone.

In public they always appeared together. She went into society with him, reminded him when it was time to leave, and departed leaning on his arm. Every one envied his lot; a lucky man to have such a lovely and faithful wife! If she were not so true and good! If he could only hate her! But no scandal could touch her.

This spring brings no melting of her ice-bound heart. The glaciers grow every day. Michael cursed his fate. With all his treasures he cannot buy his wife's love. It is all the worse for him that he is rich; splendour and great wealth widen the rift between them. Poverty binds close within its four walls those who belong to each other; labourers and fishermen, who have only one room and one bed, are more fortunate than he. The woodman, whose wife holds the other end of the saw when he is at work, is an enviable man: when they have

finished they sit down on the ground, eat their bean-porridge out of one bowl, and kiss each other afterwards.

Let us become poor people!

Timar began to hate his riches, and tried to get rid of them. If he was unfortunate and became poor, he would get nearer to his wife, he thought.

He could not succeed in impoverishing himself. Fortune pursues those who despise it. Everything he touched, which with another would certainly have failed, became a brilliant success. In his hands the impossible turned to reality—the die always threw six; if he tried to lose his money by gambling, he broke the bank—gold streamed in upon him; if he ran away or hid, it rolled after him and found him out.

And all this he would have joyfully given for a kiss from his wife's sweet lips.

And yet they say money is almighty. Everything is to be had for money. Yes—false lying love, bright smiles on the charming lips of such as feel it not—forbidden sinful love, which must

be concealed—but not the love of one who can love truly and faithfully.

Timar almost wished he could hate his wife. He would have liked to believe that she loved another, that she was faithless and forgot her wifely duty; but he could not find any cause for hatred. No one saw his wife anywhere but on her husband's arm. In society she knew how to preserve a bearing which compelled respect, and kept bold advances at a distance. She did not dance at balls, and gave as a reason that when a girl she had not been taught to dance, and as a woman she no longer wished to learn. She sought the company of older women. If her husband went on a journey, she never left the house. But what did she at home? For reception-rooms in society are transparent, but not the walls of one's house. To this question Michael had a most convincing reply.

In this house Athalie lived with Timéa.

Athalie was—not the guardian angel but the guardian devil of Timéa's honour. Every step, every word, every thought of his wife, every sigh she uttered, every tear she shed, even the

unconscious mutterings of her dreams, were spied upon by another woman, who hated him as well as his wife, and certainly would hasten to make both miserable, if a shadow of guilt could be found on the walls of the house.

If Timéa, at the moment when she begged Michael to allow Athalie and Frau Sophie to continue living in the same house, had listened to anything but the voice of her kind and feeling heart, she could not have invented a better protection for herself than keeping with her the girl who had once been the bride of the man she ought never to meet again.

These pitiless and malicious eyes follow her everywhere; as long as the guardian devil is silent, Timéa is not condemned even by God. Athalie is silent.

. . . . . .

Athalie was a real dragon to Timéa, in small things as well as great. No circumstance, ever so trifling, escaped her attention if it afforded her a chance of playing Timéa a trick. She pretended that Timéa wished to show her gen-

erosity by treating the quondam young lady of the house as a sister, or like a lady-visitor, which was enough to make Athalie behave in company as if she were a servant. Every day Timéa took the broom out of her hand by force when she came in to clean the room; she constantly caught her cleaning "her mistress's" clothes, and if visitors came to dinner, she could not be induced to leave the kitchen. Athalie had received back from Timéa her whole arsenal of ornaments and toilet necessaries. She had wardrobes full of silk and merino dresses; but she chose to wear her shabbiest and dirtiest gowns, which formerly she had put on only when the hairdresser was busy with her coiffure; and she was glad if she could burn a hole in her dress in the kitchen, or drop oil on it when she trimmed the lamp. She knew how much this hurt Timéa. All her jewels too, worth thousands, had been restored to her: she did not wear them, but bought herself a paste brooch for ten kreuzers, and put it on. Timéa took the brooch away quietly, and had a real opal put into it; the faded old dresses she

burned, and had others made for Athalie of the stuff she was herself wearing.

Oh yes, one could grieve Timéa, but not make her angry.

Even in her way of speaking, Athalie made a parade of an insufferable humility, although, or rather because, she knew it hurt Timéa. If the latter asked for anything, Athalie rushed to fetch it with an alacrity like that of a black slave who fears the whip. She never spoke in a natural tone, but annoyed Timéa by always lowering her voice to the thin whining sound which gives an impression of servility; she stammered with affected weakness, and could not pronounce the letter *s*.

She never let herself be surprised into forgetfulness or familiarity; but her most refined cruelty consisted in her unseasonable praises of the husband and wife to each other.

When she was alone with Timéa, she sighed, "Oh how happy you are, Timéa, in having such a good husband who loves you so much!" If Timar came home, she received him with naïve reproaches. "Is it right to stay away so long?

Timéa is quite desperate, she awaits you with such longing; go in gently and surprise your wife. Hold your hands over her eyes, and make her guess who it is."

Both had to bear the derision which, under the mask of a tender, flattering sympathy, wounded their hearts. Athalie knew only too well that neither of them was happy.

But when she was alone, how completely she threw off the mask with which she tormented the others, and gave vent to her suppressed rage. If alone in her room, she threw the broom Timéa had tried to take away furiously on the ground; then again beat the chairs and sofas with the handle, in order, as she said, to shake the dust out, but really to work off her anger on them. If in going out or in her dress caught in the door, or the sleeve on the handle, she wrenched it away with her teeth clenched, so that either the dress was torn or the handle dragged off, and then she was satisfied.

Broken crockery, chipped glasses, mutilated furniture, bore witness in quantities to the disastrous hours they passed in her company.

Poor Mama Sophie avoided her own daughter, and was afraid to be left alone with her. She was the only person in the house who ever heard Athalie's natural voice, and to whom she showed the bottomless depths of the gulf her hatred had dug. Frau Sophie was frightened of sleeping in the same room with her, and in a confidential moment showed her faithful cook the black bruises which her daughter's hand had left on her arms. When Athalie came into her mother's room in the evening, she would pinch her, and scream in her ear, "Why did you ever give me birth?"

And when at last she went to bed, after finishing her day's work with pretended gentleness and hidden fury, she required no one to help her. She tore off her clothes, dragged the knotted strings asunder, ill-treated her hair with hands and comb as if it was some one else's; then stamped on her clothes, blew out the candle, leaving a long wick to smoulder and fill the room with its evil odour, and threw herself on her bed: there she bit the pillow, and tore at it with her teeth while she brooded over

the torture she had to endure. Sleep only came to her after she had heard a door shut—the door of the lonely chamber of the master; then she was glad—then she could sleep.

It could be no secret to her that the young husband and wife were not happy. She waited with malicious joy to see what mischief could be developed from it.

Neither of them seemed to notice it. No quarrel ever took place; no complaint, not even an involuntary sigh, ever escaped either of them. Timéa remained unchanged, only the husband grew more gloomy every day. He sat for hours by his wife, often holding her hands in his, but he did not look into her eyes, and rose to go away without a word. Men cannot keep a secret as women can. Timar got into the habit of going away and fixing the day of his return, and then returning sooner than he was expected. Another time he surprised his wife at a moment when he was not looked for; he pretended a chance had brought him home, and would not say what he wanted. But suspicion was

written on his brow. Jealousy left him no peace.

One day Michael said at home that he had to go to Levetinczy, and could hardly get back in less than a month. All his preparations were made for a long absence. When the married couple took leave of each other with a kiss—a cool, conventional kiss—Athalie was present.

Athalie smiled. Another would hardly have noticed the smile, or at any rate would not, like Michael, have marked the derision which lay in it—the malicious mockery at one who little knows what goes on behind his back. It was as if she said, "When you are once gone, you fool——!"

Michael took the sting of this spiteful smile with him on his journey. He carried it on his heart half-way to Levetinczy; then he made his carriage turn round and by midnight he was back in Komorn. In his house there were two extra entrances to his room, whose keys he always carried about with him, so that he could get in without any one knowing of his return. From his room he could reach Timéa's through

the several anterooms. His wife was not in the habit of locking her bedroom door. She was accustomed to read in bed, and the maid generally had to come and see whether she had not fallen asleep without putting out the light. On the other side, the room in which Athalie and her mother slept adjoined his wife's bedroom. Michael approached the door noiselessly and opened it cautiously. All was still; every one slept. The room was dimly lit by the shaded light of a night-lamp.

Michael drew the curtain aside: the same statue of a sleeping saint lay before him which he had once aroused to life in the cabin of the St Barbara. She seemed to be fast asleep; she did not feel his neighbourhood; she did not see him through her downcast lashes. But a slumbering woman can see the man she loves even in her sleep, and with closed eyes. Michael bent over her breast and counted her heart-beats. Her heart beat with its normal calm. No suspicious symptom to be found—nothing to feed the hungry monster which seeks a victim.

He stood long and gazed on the slumbering form. Then suddenly he started. Athalie stood before him, dressed, and with a candle in her hand. Again that insulting smile of mockery lay on her lips. "Have you forgotten something?" she asked in a whisper.

Michael trembled like a thief caught in the act.

"Hush!" said he, pointing to the sleeper, and hurried away from the bed. "I forgot my papers."

"Shall I wake Timéa that she may get them out?"

Timar was angry at being detected for the first time in his life in a direct lie.

His papers were not kept by Timéa, but in his own room.

"No, do not wake my wife; the papers are in my room—I only wanted the key."

"And you have already found it?" asked Athalie seriously, who then lighted the candles and officiously conducted Michael to his room.

Here she put down the candle and did not go away. Michael turned over his papers with

confusion; he could not find what he sought—naturally—for he knew not what to look for. At last he shut his desk without taking anything out. Again he was met by the hateful smile which from time to time played round Athalie's lips. "Do you wish for anything?" said Athalie, in answer to his inquiring looks.

Michael remained silent.

"Do you wish me to speak?"

Michael felt at these words as if the world was falling on him. He dared not answer.

"Shall I tell you of Timéa?" whispered Athalie, bending nearer to him, and holding the stupefied man under the spell of her beautiful serpent-eyes.

"What do you know?" asked Michael, hotly.

"Everything—do you wish me to tell you?"

Michael was undecided.

"But I can tell you beforehand that you will be very unhappy when you learn what I know."

"Speak!"

"Very well—listen. I know as well as you do that Timéa does not love you. But one

thing I know which you do not—namely, that Timéa is as true to you as an angel."

Timar started violently.

"You did not expect that from me? It would have been welcome news to hear from me that your wife deserved your contempt, so that you might be able to hate and reject her. No, sir; the marble statue you have taken to wife does not love you, but does not deceive you. This I only know, but with absolute certainty—oh, your honour is well guarded. If you had engaged the hundred-eyed Argus of the legend as a watchman, she could not be better guarded than by me. Nothing of what she does, says, thinks, escapes me: in the deepest recesses of her heart she can have no feeling hidden from me. You acted wisely in the interests of your honour when you took me into your house. You will not drive me out of it, though you hate me; for you know well that as long as I am here, the man whom you fear can never approach your sanctuary. I am the diamond lock of your house. You shall know all: when you leave town, your house is

a cloister while you are absent; no visitors are received, neither man nor woman; the letters which come to your wife, you will find unopened on your writing-table; you can give them to her to read or throw them into the fire, just as you choose. Your wife never sets foot in the streets, she only drives out with me; her only walk is on the island, and I am always with her; I see her suffer, but I never hear her complain. How could she complain to me, who suffer the same torment, and on her account? For from the time when that ghostly face appeared in the house my misery began; till then I was happy and beloved. Do not be afraid of my bursting into tears; I love no longer—now I only hate, and with my whole soul. You can trust your house to me; you can ride through the world in peace; you leave me at home, and as long as you find your wife alive on your return you may be sure that she is faithful to you. For know, sir, that if she ever exchanges a friendly word with that man, or responds to his smile, or reads a letter from him, I would not wait for you, I would kill her

myself, and you would only come home to her funeral. Now you know what you leave behind—the polished dagger which the madness of jealousy holds aimed at your wife's heart; and under the shadow of that dagger you will daily lay your head down to sleep, and although I inspire you with loathing, you will be forced to cling to me with desperation."

Timar felt all his mental energy crippled under this outburst of demoniac passion.

"I have told you all I know about Timéa, about you and myself; I repeat once more, you have taken to wife a girl who loves another, and this other was once mine. It was you who took this house from me; under your hand my father and my property sank into dust; and then you made Timéa the mistress of this house. You see now what you did. Your wife is not a woman, but a martyr. It is not enough that you should suffer; you must also acquire the certainty that you have made her, for whose possession you strove, miserable, and that there can be no happiness for Timéa as long as you live. With this sting in your

breast you may leave your house, Herr Levetinczy, and you will nowhere find a balm for your smarting wound, and I rejoice at it with all my heart."

With glowing cheeks, gnashing teeth, and glaring eyes, Athalie bowed to Timar, who sank exhausted into a chair. But the girl clenched her fist as if to thrust an invisible dagger into his heart.

"And now—turn me out of your house if you dare." All womanhood was quenched in the girl's face. Instead of a hypocritical submission, it was dominated by the fury of unbridled passion. "Drive me away from here if you dare!"

And proud as a triumphant demon she left Michael's room. She had taken the lighted candle which was on the table away with her, and left the wretched husband in darkness. She had told him that she was not the humble servant, but the guardian devil of the house. As Timar saw the girl with the light in her hand go towards the door of Timéa's bedroom, something whispered to him to spring up, seize Athalie's arm, and setting his foot before the

threshold, to cry to her, "Remain then yourself in this accursed house, as I am bound by the promise I gave; but not with us!"

And then to rush into Timéa's room, as on the eventful night when the ship went down, to lift her in his arms from the bed, and with the cry, "This house is falling in, let us save ourselves!" to fly from it with her, and take her to some place where no one spies on her . . . this thought darted through his head . . . that was what he ought to have done. . . .

The door of the bedroom opened, and Athalie looked back once more; then she went in, the door shut, and Michael remained alone in the darkness.

Oh, in what darkness!

Then he heard the key turn twice in the lock. His fate was sealed; he arose and felt round in the dark for his travelling-bag. He kindled no light, made no noise, so that no one should awake and report that he had been here. When he had collected all his things, he crept softly to the door, shut it gently behind him, and left his own house cautiously and noiselessly, like a

thief, like a fugitive. That girl had driven him away from it.

Out in the street he was met by a snow shower. That is good weather for one who does not wish to be seen. The wind whistled through the streets, and drove the snowflakes into his face ; Michael Timar, however, went on his way in an open carriage, in weather in which one would not turn a dog into the street.

CHAPTER III.

SPRING MEADOWS.

As far as the Lower Danube the traveller took with him rough and wintry skies; here and there fresh snow covered the fields, and the woods stood bare. The stormy cold suited the thoughts with which Timar was occupied. That cruel girl was right—not only the husband but the wife was wretched. The man doubly so; for he was the author of their mutual misery.

These bitter disconsolate thoughts followed Michael to Baja, where he had an office, and where, when he travelled into the flax districts of Hungary, he had his letters sent. A whole bundle awaited him; he opened one after another with indifference; what did he care whether the rape had been frostbitten or not,

that the duties in England were raised, or that exchange was higher? But amongst the letters he found two which were not uninteresting—one from his Viennese, the other from his Stamboul agent. The contents greatly rejoiced him. He put them both away, and from that moment the apathy began to disperse which had hitherto possessed him. He gave his orders to his agents with his usual quickness and energy, carefully noted their reports, and when he had finished with them, proceeded on his way in haste.

Now his journey had an object—no great or important one, but still an object. It was to give a pleasure to two poor people—but a real joy.

The weather had changed; the sky had cleared, and the sun shone warmly down below. In Hungary, where summer follows immediately on winter, these swift changes are common. Below Baja the face of the country, too, was changed. Whilst Michael rushed southward with frequent changes of horses, it was as if nature had in one day advanced by many weeks. At Mohacs he was received by woods

decked in new green; about Zambor the fields were spread with a verdant carpet; at Neusatz the meadows were already dressed with flowers; and in the plains of Pancsova golden stretches of rape smiled at him, and the hills looked as though covered with rosy snow—the almonds and cherry trees were in blossom. The two days' journey was like a dream-picture. The day before yesterday snow-covered fields in Komorn, and to-day on the lower Danube hedges in bloom!

Michael alighted at the Levetinczy castle to spend the night. He gave his instructions to the bailiff on the day of his arrival; the next morning he got up early, entered the carriage, and drove to the Danube to inspect his cargo-ships. Everything was in order. Our Herr Johann Fabula had been appointed overseer of the whole flotilla: there was nothing for him to do. "Our gracious master can go and shoot ducks."

And Herr von Levetinczy followed this good advice of Herr Fabula. He had a boat brought, and ordered provisions for a week, his gun, and

plenty of ammunition to be put in it. No one will be surprised if he does not return from the reed-bed, now full of prime water-fowl, before a week has elapsed. It swarms with duck, snipe, and herons, the last only valued for their feathers; even pelicans are to be met with, and an Egyptian ibis has been shot there. It is said a flamingo was once seen. When an ardent sportsman once gets into those marshes, you may wait till he comes out! And Timar loved sport, like all sailors. This time Michael did not load his gun. He let his boat float down with the stream till he reached the point of the Ostrova island—there he seized the sculls and crossed the Danube obliquely. When he got round the island he soon saw where he was. From the southern reed-beds rose the tops of the well-known poplars—thither he went. There was already a channel broken through the rushes, across and along as required, if you only understood it. Where Michael had once been, he could find his way in the dark. What would Almira and Narcissa be doing? What should they be doing in such lovely weather but

gratifying their passion for sport? Only, however, within certain limits: the field-mouse must be pursued at night, and that is easy for Narcissa, but she is strictly forbidden to chase birds. To Almira the marmots which came across the ice and settled in the island are positively interdicted. Aquatic prey still remain, and that is good sport too. Almira wades into the pure clear water amongst the heaps of great stones at the bottom, and cautiously puts her fore-paw into a hole, out of which something dark is peeping. Suddenly she makes a great jump, draws her foot back, limps whining out of the water on three legs, and on the fourth paw hangs a large black crab, which has caught hold with its claws. Almira hobbles along in despair till, on reaching the bank, she succeeds in shaking off the dangerous monster; it is then carefully inspected by both Almira and Narcissa, to see at what price it can be induced to allow its body to be deprived of the shell. The crab naturally does not quite see the fun of this, and retires with all speed backwards to the water. The two sportsmen, however, shove

the reactionary party forward with their paws, until at one blow it is turned on its back, and now all three are in doubt what to do next—Almira, Narcissa, and the crab.

Almira's attention is suddenly attracted by another object. She hears a noise and scents something. A friend approaches by water; she does not bark at him, but utters a low growl. This is her way of laughing, like some cheery old gentleman. She recognises the man in the boat. Michael springs out, fastens the boat to a willow stump, pats Almira's head, and asks her, "Well, then, how is it all? is it all well?" The dog replied many things, but in the Newfoundland-dog language. To judge by the tone, the answer is satisfactory.

Then all at once a pitiful cry disturbs the pleasant greeting. The catastrophe which might have been foreseen has occurred. Narcissa came near enough to the upset and sprawling crab for it to catch her ear with its nippers, and then to bury all its six claws in her fur. Timar rushed to the scene of misfortune, and with great presence of mind, seeing the magni-

tude of the danger, seized the mailed criminal in a place where its weapons could not reach him, pressed its head between his strong fingers, and obliged it to let go its prey; then he dashed it with such force on to a stone, that it was shattered, and gave up its black ghost. Narcissa, to show her gratitude, sprang on to the shoulder of her chivalrous deliverer, and snorted from there at her dead enemy.

After this introductory deed of heroism, Timar busied himself in disembarking what he had brought with him. All are packed into a knapsack, which he can easily throw over his shoulder. But the gun, the gun! Almira cannot abide him with a gun in his hand, but he cannot leave it here, for it might easily be stolen by some one. What to do? The idea struck Timar to give it into Almira's charge, who then, in her leonine jaws, carried the weapon proudly before him as a poodle bears its master's cane. Narcissa sat on his shoulder and purred in his ear. Michael allowed Almira to go on before and show him the way.

Timar felt transformed when he trod the

turfy paths of the island. Here was holy rest and deepest solitude. The fruit-trees of this paradise are in bloom; between their white and rosy flower-pyramids wild roses arch their sprays; the golden sunbeams coax the flowers' fragrance into the air; the breeze is laden with it — with every breath one inhales gold and love. The forest of blossom is full of the hum of the bees, and in that mysterious sound, from all these flower-eyes, God speaks, God looks: it is a temple of the Lord. And that church-music may not be wanting, the nightingale flutes his psalm of lament, and the lark trills his song of praise — only better than King David. At a spot where the purple lilacs parted, and the little island-home was visible, Michael stood spell-bound. The little house seemed to swim in a flaming sea, but not of water, only of roses. It was covered with rose-wreaths climbing to the roof, and for five acres round it only roses were visible—thousands of bushes, and six-foot rose-trees, forming pyramids, hedges, and arcades. It was a rose-forest, a rose-mountain, a rose-labyrinth, whose splen-

dour dazzled the eye and spread afar a scent which surrounded one like a supernatural atmosphere.

Hardly had Michael entered on the winding path through this wilderness of roses, before a melodious cry of joy was heard. His name was called. "Ah, Herr Timar!"

And she who had uttered his name came running towards him. Timar had already recognised her by her voice: it was Noémi—little Noémi, whom he had not seen for nearly three years. How she had grown since then—how changed, how developed she was! Her dress was no longer neglected, but neat, though simple. In her rich golden hair a rose-bud was fastened.

"Ah, Herr Timar!" cried the girl, and stretched out her hand to him from afar, greeting him with frank delight, and a warm shake of the hand.

Michael returned it, and remained lost in gazing at the girl. Here then, at last, is a face that beams with joy at the sight of him. "How long it is since we saw you!" said the girl.

"And how pretty you have grown!" exclaimed he.

Sympathy shone in every line of Noémi's face. "So you remember me still?" asked Timar, holding the little hand fast in his own.

"We have often thought of you."

"Is Madame Therese well?"

"There she comes."

When she saw Michael she hastened her steps; from a distance she had recognised the former ship's captain, who now again, in his grey coat and with his knapsack, approached her hut. "God greet you! you have kept us waiting a long time!" exclaimed the woman to her visitor. "So you have thought of us at last?" And she embraced Michael without ceremony; then his well-filled knapsack caught her eye. "Almira," she said to the dog, "take this bag and carry it in."

"There are a brace of birds in it," said Michael.

"Indeed! then take care, Almira, that Narcissa does not get at it."

Noémi was affronted. "Narcissa is not so badly educated as that."

To make it up, Frau Therese kissed her daughter, and Noémi was reconciled.

"Now let us go in," said Therese, taking Michael's arm familiarly. "Come, Noémi."

A huge boat-shaped basket made of white osier-twigs stood in the way, and its heaped-up contents were covered with a cloth. Noémi began to lift it by both handles; Michael sprang to help her, and Noémi burst into a childish shriek of laughter, and drew off the cloth. The basket was heaped with rose-leaves. Michael took one handle, and so they carried it together with its sweet cargo along the lavender-bordered path.

"Do you make rose-water?" asked Timar.

Therese threw a glance at Noémi. "See how he finds out everything!"

"With us in Komorn much rose-water is made. Many poor women live by it."

"Indeed? Then elsewhere also the rose is a blessing of the Lord,—the exquisite flower which alone would make man love this world!

And it not only rejoices his heart, but gives him bread. Look you — last year was a bad season; the late frosts spoilt the fruit and the vintage; the wet, cold summer destroyed the bees, and the poultry died of disease: we should have had to fall back on our stores if it had not been for the roses, which helped us in our need. They bloom every year, and are always faithful to us. We made three hundred gallons of rose-watėr, which we sold in Servia and got grain in exchange. Oh, you dear roses—you life-saving flowers!"

The little settlement had been enlarged since Timar was last there. There was a kiln and a kitchen for the preparation of the rose-water. Here was an open fire with the copper retort, from which the first essence dropped slowly; near the hearth stood a great tub with the crushed rose-leaves, and on a broad bench lay the fresh ones which required drying.

Michael helped Noémi to empty the basket on to the bench; that was a scent, a perfume, in which one could revel and intoxicate one's self!

Noémi laid her little head on the soft hill of rose-leaves, and said, "It would be delicious to sleep on such a bed of roses."

"Foolish child," Therese chid her. "You would never awake from that slumber; the odour would kill you."

"That would be a lovely death!"

"Then you want to die?" Frau Therese said, reproachfully; "you want to leave me here alone, you naughty child!"

"No, no!" cried Noémi, embracing her mother with eager kisses. "I leave you, my dear, darling, only little mother!"

"Why do you make such silly jests then? Don't you think, Herr Timar, it is not right for a young girl to allow herself these jokes with her mother—for a little girl who was playing with a doll only yesterday?" Michael quite agreed with Frau Therese that it was inexcusable under any pretence for a young lady to tell her mother that she thought any kind of death would be delightful. "Now just stop here and see that the essence does not boil, while I go to the kitchen to get a good dinner

ready for our guest. You'll stay all day, of course?"

"I will stay to-day and to-morrow too, if you will give me something to do for you. As long as you find me work I will remain."

"Oh, then, you can stop the whole week," Noémi interrupted, "for I can find you plenty to do."

"What work would you give Herr Timar, you little simpleton?" laughed the mother.

"Why, of course, to crush the rose-leaves!"

"But perhaps he does not know how."

"How should I not know all about it?" said Timar. "I have often enough helped my mother with it at home."

"Your mother was a very good woman, I am sure."

"Very good."

"And you loved her very much?"

"Very much."

"Is she still living?"

"She has long been dead."

"So now you have no one in the world belonging to you?"

Timar thought a moment, and bowed his head sadly—"No one." . . . He had spoken the truth.

Michael noticed that Therese still stood at the door, doubtful whether to go or not. "Do you know, good mother," said he, suddenly remembering, "you need not go to the kitchen to cook anything for me. I have all sorts of provisions with me; there is only the table to spread—we shall all have enough."

"Then who has looked after you and provided you so well with travelling comforts?" asked Noémi.

"Who but our Herr Johann Fabula?"

"Oh, the honest steersman!—is he here too?"

"He is loading the ship on the other bank."

Therese guessed Timar's thought, but she would not be behind him in delicate tact. She wished to show him that she had no scruple about leaving him alone with Noémi. "No, I have thought of something else; I will manage both here and in the kitchen. You, Noémi, can meanwhile take Herr Timar over the island and show him all the changes since he was here."

Noémi was an obedient daughter; she did without question what her mother told her. She tied her Turkish handkerchief round her head, which framed her face charmingly. Timar recognised the scarf he had left as a present to her.

"*Au revoir*, darling!" "*Au revoir*," said the mother and daughter with a kiss. They seemed to take leave of each other every time they parted, as if going on a long journey; and when they met again in an hour, they embraced as if they had been separated for years: the poor things had only each other in this world. Noémi threw one more inquiring look, and Therese answered with a nod which meant, "Yes, go!"

Noémi and Timar now wandered on through the whole island. The path was so narrow that they were forced to walk close together, but Almira had the sense to push her great head between them and form a natural barrier. In the last three years cultivation had made great strides on the little island. A practicable road had been cut through the bushes; the old

poplars had been uprooted, the wild crabs grafted; a skilful hand had formed neat fences from the broken branches; and where the orchard ceased, hedges divided the island, and hemmed in fields which supplied pasture for lambs and goats. One little lamb had a red ribbon round its neck, and this was Noémi's pet. When the flock saw her they ran to her and bleated a greeting which she understood; then they followed her and Timar to the border of the field where the fence stopped then.

Behind these was to be seen a plantation of fine walnuts, with widespread shady heads and thick trunks, whose bark was smooth as silk. "Look," said Noémi, "those are my mother's pride; they are fifteen years old—just a year younger than I am," she said quite simply.

On the right was the marsh, as Timar well remembered when he first came to the island and made his way through it. Now it was covered with water-plants; yellow lilies and white bell-flowers were spread over the surface of the morass, and in the midst stood quietly two storks.

Timar opened the little gate; it was a pleasant reminder to see this wilderness once more, and yet it seemed to him as if his guide was afraid and uncomfortable.

"Are you still all alone here?" asked Michael.

"We two alone. At market-times people come to barter with us, and in winter wood-cutters come and help us to hew the trees and root them up: the wood serves to pay them. We do the rest ourselves."

"But fruit-gathering is very troublesome, especially on account of the wasps."

"Oh, that is not hard work; our friends singing there on the trees help us with the wasp-killing. Do you see all the nests? Our labourers live there; here no one troubles them, and they do us good service. Just listen."

The wilderness resounded indeed with a heavenly concert. In the evening every bird hastens home, and then they are at their best. The cuckoo, the clock of the woods, has enough to do in striking the hours, and the thrush whistles in Greek strophes.

Then suddenly Noémi screamed aloud, grew pale, and started back with her trembling hand on her heart, so that Timar felt it his duty to seize her by the hand that she might not fall. "What is it?" Noémi held her hand before her eyes and said, half laughing and half crying, in a tone of mingled fear and disgust, "Look, look! there he comes."

"Who?"

"There, that one!"

He saw a large, wrinkled, fat frog, which was creeping quietly in the grass, keeping an eye on the new-comers, and ready for a spring in case of danger into the nearest water-course.

Noémi was so paralysed with fright that she had not the strength to run away.

"Are you afraid of frogs?" asked Timar.

"I have a horror of them; I should be frightened to death if it jumped on me."

"How like a girl! They love cats because they coax and flatter, but they cannot bear frogs because they are ugly; and yet, do you know, the frogs are just as good friends to us as the birds: this common, despised animal is the

best assistant to the gardener. You know there are moths and beetles and grubs which only come out at night; birds are asleep then, but the detested frog comes out of his hole and attacks our enemies in the dark; he feeds on the night-moths and their grubs, the caterpillars and the slugs, and even the vipers. It is splendid the war he makes on noxious insects. Keep quiet, just look—the ugly wrinkled frog is not creeping there to frighten you—he is not thinking about it. He is a gentle beast, conscious of no sin, and does not regard you as an enemy. Do you see a blue beetle fanning with his wings? That is one of the worst insects, a wood-borer, of which one grub suffices to spoil a whole young plantation; and our little friend has fixed on him as a prey. Don't disturb him; look, he is drawing himself up for a spring—wait. There! now he has made his leap, and darts out his long tongue like lightning: the beetle is swallowed. You see that our good frog is not such a disgusting creature, in spite of his shabby coat."

Noémi clasped her hands quite pleased, and

already felt less dislike to frogs. She let Michael lead her to a seat and tell her what sensible creatures they are, what funny tricks they play, and what curious games exist among them. He told her of the sky-blue frog of Surinam, of which one specimen cost the King of Prussia 4500 thalers; then of the fire-frog, which sheds a clear light around in the darkness, creeps into houses, hides in the beams, and croaks unmercifully at night. In Brazil sometimes you cannot hear the singers in the opera-house for the chorus set up by the frogs which live in the building. Now Noémi was laughing at this awful enemy, and the laugh is half-way from hatred to love.

"If only they would not make such an ugly noise!"

"But you see in these tones they express their tender affection for their little wives, for amongst frogs only the little husband has a voice—the lady is dumb. The frog exclaims all night to his wife, 'How lovely, how charming you are!' Can there be a more affectionate creature than a frog?"

Noémi was beginning to look at it from the sentimental side.

"Then, too, the frog is a learned animal. You must know that the true frog is a weather-prophet: when it is going to rain he knows it, comes out of the water and croaks his prophecy; when dry weather is coming he goes back to the water."

"Ah!" began Noémi, getting interested.

"I will catch one," said Timar; "I hear one amongst the bushes."

He soon came back with a tree-frog between his palms. Noémi trembled and got excited. She was red and pale by turns.

"Now look," said Timar to her, opening his hands a little. "Is it not a pretty little thing? It is as lovely a green as the young grass, and its tiny foot is like a miniature human hand. How its little heart beats! How it looks at us with its beautiful wise black eyes with a golden ring round them! It is not afraid of us!"

Noémi, wavering between fear and curiosity, stretched out a timid hand, but drew it quickly back.

"Take it, touch it—it is the most harmless creature on God's earth." She stretched out her hand again, frightened and yet laughing, but looked into Timar's eyes instead of at the frog, and started when the cold body came in contact with her reluctant nerves; but then suddenly she laughed with pleasure, like a child which would not go into the cold water, and then is glad to be there.

"Now look, he does not move in your hand; he is quite comfortable. We will take him home and find a glass, put water in, and then place a small ladder in it which I can cut out of wood. The frog shall be imprisoned in it, and when he knows that rain is coming he will climb up the ladder. Give it to me; I will carry it."

"No, no; I will keep him, and carry him home myself."

"Then you must hold your hand shut, or he will jump out; but not too tight so as to press him. And now let us go, for the dew is falling, and the grass is wet."

They turned homewards, and Noémi ran on,

calling from afar to Therese, "Mother, mother, see what we have caught! a beautiful bird."

Mama Therese prepared to scold her daughter severely.

"Don't you know that it is forbidden to catch birds?"

"But such a bird! Herr Timar caught it, and gave it to me. Just peep into my hand."

Frau Therese threw up her hands when she saw the green tree-frog there.

"Look how it blinks at me with its beautiful eyes!" cried Noémi, beaming with delight. "We are going to put him in a glass, catch flies for him, and he will foretell the weather for us. Oh the dear little thing!" And she held the frog caressingly to her cheek.

Therese turned to Timar in astonishment. "Sir, you are a magician. Only yesterday you could have driven this girl out of her senses with such a creature as that."

But Noémi was quite enthusiastic about the frog. Whilst she laid the table on the veranda for supper, she delivered a complete batrachian lecture to her mother on what she had heard

from Timar: how useful, as well as wise, amusing, and interesting frogs were. It was not true that they spat venom as people said, that they crept into sleepers' mouths, sucked the milk of cows, nor that they burst with poison if you held a spider to them—all this was pure calumny and stupid superstition. They are our best friends, which guard us at night; those little soft footprints which are visible on the smooth sand round the house, are the consoling sign of their nightly patrol: it would be ungrateful to fear them. Timar had meanwhile prepared a small ladder of willow-twigs for the little meteorologist. He put it in a wide-mouthed bottle, which he half filled with water, and covered with a pierced paper, through which the imprisoned prophet was to receive its provision of flies. It of course went down to the bottom, and declined either to eat or to talk. Noémi welcomed this as a sign that the weather would remain fine.

"Yes, sir," said Frau Therese, as she brought out the supper to the little table at which they all sat down; "you have not only worked

a miracle on Noémi, but have really done her a great benefit. Our island would have been a paradise if Noémi had not been so afraid of frogs. As soon as ever she saw one she grew quite white and got a fit of shivering. No human power would have induced her to go across the fence to where the innumerable frogs croak in the marsh. You have made a new creature of her, and reconciled her with her home."

"A sweet home!" sighed Timar. Therese sighed aloud.

"Why do you sigh?" Noémi asked her.

"You know well enough."

And Timar too knew to whom the sigh was due.

Noémi tried to give a cheerful turn to the conversation. "I took my aversion to frogs from the time when a naughty boy played me a trick, and threw a great big toad, as brown as a crust, at me. He said it was a bull-frog, and that if he struck it with a nettle it would roar like a bull. He did strike the poor thing, and then it began to moan piteously, so that I

can never forget it, as if it would call for vengeance against our whole race; and its body was covered with white froth. The bad boy laughed when he heard the uncanny voice of the poor beast."

"Who was that wicked boy?" asked Michael.

Noémi was silent, and only made an expressively contemptuous movement of the hand. Timar guessed the name; he looked at Frau Therese, and she nodded assent—already they can guess each other's thoughts.

"Has he never been here since?"

"Oh yes; he comes every year, and never ceases tormenting us. He has found a new way of laying us under contribution. He brings a large boat with him, and as I cannot give him any money, he loads it with honey, wax, and wool, which he sells. I give him what he wants, that he may leave us in peace."

"He has not been here lately," said Noémi.

"Oh, nothing has happened to him; I expect his arrival any day."

"If only he would come now!" said the girl.

"Why, you little goose?"

Noémi grew crimson. "Only because I should prefer it."

Timar, however, thought to himself how happy he could make these two people with a single word. But he gloated over the thought, like a child which had some sweets given to it, and begins by eating the crumbs first. He felt an inward impulse to share the joys and sorrows of these islanders.

Supper was over, the sun had set, and a splendid, still, warm night sank on to the fields; the whole sky looked like a transparent silver veil—no leaf stirred on the trees. The two women went with their visitor to the top of the great boulder; from there one had a wide view over the trees and the reed-beds far across the Danube. The island lay at their feet like an enchanted lake with variegated waves. The apple-trees swam in a rosy, and the pomegranates in a dark-red, sea of blossom; the poplars looked golden-yellow, and the pear-trees white with snowy bloom, and the waving tips of the plum-trees were radiant in brazen green. In the midst rose the rock like a

lighted cupola, wreathed with fiery roses, on whose top old lavender-bushes formed a thicket.

"Superb!" cried Timar, enchanted with the landscape outspread before him.

"You should see the rock in summer, when the yellow stonecrop is in bloom," exclaimed Noémi eagerly; "it looks as if it had on a golden robe. The lavender blossom makes a great blue crown for its head."

"I will come and see it," said Timar.

"Really?" The girl stretched out her hand to him joyously, and Michael felt a warm pressure such as no woman's hand had ever given him in his life. And then Noémi leant her head on Therese's shoulder, and threw her arm round her mother's neck. All nature was under the spell of deep repose undisturbed by any human sound. Only the monotonous chorus of the frogs enlivened the deep shadows of the night. The sky offered a curious spectacle; half was blue, and the other opal green. There are two sides even to happiness.

"Do you hear what the frogs are saying?"

whispered Noémi to her mother—"'Oh, how dear you are, how sweet!' They say that all night long—'Oh, you darling, you sweet!'" and she kissed Therese at every word.

Michael, forgetful of himself and of the whole world, stood on the rock with folded arms. The young crescent glittered between the quivering foliage of the poplars, now shining like pure silver; a wonderful new feeling crept into the man's breast. Was it fear or longing?—memory aroused or dawning hope?—awakening joy or dying grief?—instinct or warning?—madness, or that breath of spring which seizes on tree and grass, and every cold- or warm-blooded animal?

Just so had he gazed at the waning moon, which threw its long reflection on the waves as far as the sinking ship. His involuntary thoughts talked with the ghostly magnetic rays, and they with him.

"Do you not understand? I will return to-morrow, and then you will know."

CHAPTER IV.

A SPIDER AMONGST THE ROSES.

PEOPLE who live by their labour have no time to admire the moonlight from mountain-tops, or to waste in observations on the beauties of nature: the flocks of sheep and goats already waited to be relieved of their milky tribute by their mistress. Milking was the office of Frau Therese, and it was Noémi's duty to cut grass enough for the herd. Timar continued the conversation meanwhile with his back leaning against the stable-door, and lighting his pipe just as the country-man does when he is courting the peasant girl.

The great boiler must be refilled with fresh rose-infusion, and then they can all go to bed. Timar begged for the bee-house to sleep in,

where Frau Therese spread him a couch of fresh hay, and Noémi arranged his pillow. Very little was needed to woo him to slumber. Hardly had he lain down before sleep closed his eyes; he dreamt all night that he had become a gardener's boy, and was making endless rose-water.

When he awoke the sun was already high in the heavens. The bees buzzed round him busily; he had overslept himself. That some one had already been here he guessed, because near his couch lay all the toilet necessaries he had brought in his knapsack. A poor traveller who is used to shaving every day feels very uncomfortable when unable to go through that operation; his mind is as much disturbed by that confounded stubble, as if it were a prick of conscience. When he was ready, the women already awaited him at breakfast, which consisted of bread and milk, and then they went to the day's work of rose-gathering.

Michael was, as he desired, set to rose-crushing. Noémi picked off the petals, and Frau Therese was busy with the boiler. Timar told

Noémi all about roses. Not that they were like her cheeks, at which she would have burst out laughing, but he imparted to her what he had learnt about them in his travels: learned things which Noémi listened to with attention, and which instilled into her a still greater respect for Timar. With young and innocent maidens a clever, intelligent man has a great advantage.

"In Turkey they use rose-water in eating and drinking. There, too, whole groves of roses are planted; there beads are made of roses pressed into the form of balls and strung together: that is why they are called rosaries. In the East there is one lovely kind of rose from which attar is made; it is the balsam-rose, and grows on trees of ten feet high, whose branches are bent to the ground by their snow-white burden. Their scent surpasses that of any other kind; if you throw the petals into water and set them in the sun, in a very short time the surface is rainbow-coloured with the oil that the petals exude. It is the same with the evergreen rose, which does not shed its

leaves in winter. The Ceylon and Rio roses dye the hair and beard light, and so fast that they do not lose their colour for years; for this purpose alone there is a considerable trade in them. The leaves of the Moggor-rose stupefy; you are intoxicated by their scent as if with beer. The Vilmorin rose has the property that, if it is bitten by a certain insect which is obnoxious to it, it throws out great tubers, which are said to send a crying child to sleep if put under its pillow."

"Have you been everywhere where roses grow?" asked Noémi.

"Well, I have been a good deal about in the world. I have been to Vienna, Paris, and Constantinople."

"Is that far from here?"

"If one travelled on foot one would get to Vienna in thirty days from here, and to Constantinople in forty days."

"But you went in a ship."

"That takes longer still; for I should have to take in cargo on the way."

"For whom?"

"For the owner I was travelling for."

"Is Herr Brazovics still your principal?"

"Who told you about him?"

"The steersman who came with you."

"No longer now—Herr Brazovics is dead."

"Dead! so is he dead? And his wife and daughter?" interrupted Frau Therese quickly.

"They have lost everything by his death."

"Ah, just God! Thy avenging hand has reached them!"

"Mother, good mother!" cried Noémi, with gentle entreaty.

"Sir, there is one more thing you ought to know. When that blow fell on us, when I had implored Brazovics on my knees not to drive us to beggary, it struck me that this man had a wife and child. I determined to find out his wife and tell her my misery—she would help me and take pity on us. I took my child in my arms and travelled in the hottest part of the summer to Komorn. I sought her out in her fine large house, and waited at the door, for they would not let me in. At last Frau Brazovics came out with her five-years-old

daughter. I fell on my knees, and begged her for God's sake to take compassion on us, and be our mediator with her husband. The woman seized my arm and thrust me down the step; I tried in falling to protect my child with both arms, that it might not be hurt, and struck my head against one of the two pillars which support the balcony. Here is the scar still visible. The little girl laughed aloud when she saw me limping away and heard my baby cry. That is why I sing 'Hosanna,' and blessed be the hand which thrust her away from the steps down which she cast us."

"Oh, mother, don't talk so!"

"So they have come to misery? Have they become beggars themselves — the haughty purse-proud people? Do they wear rags, and beg in vain at the doors of their former friends?"

"No, dear lady," said Michael; "some one has been found to take care of them."

"Madman!" cried Therese, with passionate force. "Why should he put a spoke in fate's wheel? How can he dare to receive

into his home the curse which will ruin him?"

Noémi ran to her mother and covered her mouth with both hands; then she fell on her neck and sealed her lips with kisses. "Dearest mother, do not say such things. Do not utter curses; I cannot bear to hear them—take them back. Let me kiss away the dreadful words from your lips."

Therese recovered herself under her daughter's caresses. "Do not be afraid, silly child," she said, shaking her head. "Curses fall idly on the air. They are only a bad superstitious habit of us old women. God never thinks of noticing the curses of such worms as we are, and keeping them till the day of judgment. My curse will take effect on no one."

It is already fulfilled on me, thought Timar. I am the madman who received them into his house.

Noémi tried to bring the subject of roses back. "Tell me, Herr Timar, how could you get such a Moggor-rose whose scent stupefies?"

"If you wish, I will bring you one."

"Where do they grow?"

"In Brazil."

"Is that far?"

"The other side of the world?"

"Must you go by sea?"

"Two months continuously at sea."

"And why would you go?"

"On business—and to fetch you a Moggor-rose."

"Then do not bring me any."

Noémi left the kitchen, and Michael noticed that tears were in her eyes. She only returned to the distillery when she had filled her basket with rose-leaves, and shook them out on to the rush-matting, where they made a large hill.

The boiling of yesterday's rose-essence lasted till mid-day, and after breakfast Frau Therese said to her guest that there was not much work for to-day, and that they could go for a walk in the island. One who was so great a traveller might be able to give good advice to the islanders, as to what vegetables they might usefully and profitably introduce into their little Eden. Frau Therese said to the dog,

"Stop here and watch the house! Lie down in the veranda and don't stir!" Almira understood and obeyed.

Michael disappeared with his companions amongst the plantations.

Hardly had they vanished into the wood before Almira began to prick her ears uneasily and to growl angrily. She scented something. She shook her head, rose from time to time, but lay down again. A man's voice became audible, which sang a German song, whose refrain was, "She wears, if I can trust my eyes, a jet-black camisole." The person coming from the shore sings, of course, on purpose to attract the attention of the inhabitants. He is afraid of the great dog—but it does not bark.

The new arrival appears from amongst the shadows of the rose-arbour. It is Theodor Krisstyan.

This time he is attired like a fashionable dandy, in a dark-blue tunic with golden buttons; and his overcoat hangs on his arm. Almira does not stir at his approach. She is

a philosopher, and reasons, if I fly at this man, the end of it will be that I shall be tied up and not he. I shall do better to keep my opinion of him to myself, and to look on in armed neutrality at what he does. Theodor drew near confidently, and whistling to his huge black enemy. "Your servant, Almira. Come, Almirakin, you dear old dog—where are your ladies? Bark a bit to please me. Where is our dear Mama Therese?" Almira could not be induced to answer. "Look, then, little doggie, what I have got for you—a piece of meat; there, eat it. What? Don't you want it? You fancy it's poisoned, you fool? Gobble it up, you beauty." But Almira would not even sniff at the piece of meat, until Narcissa (it is well known that cats have no decision of character) crept up to it, which made Almira angry, and she began to scratch a large hole in the ground; there she buried the meat, like a careful dog which makes provision for a day of necessity.

"Well, what a distrustful beast it is," murmured Theodor to himself. "Am I to be allowed to go in?"

But that was not allowed. Almira did not say so in words, but she curled her lip to let him see the beautiful white teeth underneath.

"Stupid creature, you don't mean to bite me? Where can the women be? Perhaps in the distillery?"

Theodor went in and looked round — he found no one. He washed his face and hands in the steaming rose-water, and it gave him especial pleasure to think that so he had spoilt the work of a whole day.

When he wanted to come out of the distillery, he found the entrance barred by the dog. Almira had laid herself down across the threshold and showed him her white teeth. "Indeed, so now you won't let me come out, you churl! Very well, I can wait here till the women return. I can find a little place to rest on." And so saying he threw himself on the heap of rose-leaves Noémi had turned out. "Ah, what a good bed—a Lucullan couch! Ha! ha!"

The women came back with Michael from their walk through the island. Therese saw

with uneasiness that Almira was not lying in the veranda, but was guarding the door of the distillery.

When Theodor heard Therese's voice, he thought of a good trick to play. He buried himself in the rose-leaves, so that nothing was to be seen of him; and when Noémi, with the words "What have you here, Almira?" looked in at the door, he put his head out and grinned at her: "Your own beloved bridegroom is here, lovely Noémi!"

Noémi, starting back, screamed aloud.

"What is it?" asked the mother, hastening up.

"There, amongst the roses . . ." stammered the girl.

"Well, what amongst the roses? A spider?"

"Yes . . . a spider . . ."

Theodor sprang laughing from his bed of roses, and like one who has surprised his dear ones with a capital joke, rushed with shouts of laughter to Mama Therese, embraced her, without noticing her angry looks or Noémi's disgusted face, and kissed her several times.

"Ha! ha! Did I take you by surprise? You sweet dear Mama, be happy: your dear son-in-law is here; he has risen like a fairy from the roses. He! he!" Then he turned towards Noémi, but she slipped away from his embrace, and then first Theodor Krisstyan was aware of the presence of a third person—Michael Timar.

This discovery damped his joviality, which indeed was only put on, and for this reason it was disagreeable to see some one with whom most unpleasant recollections were connected.

"Your servant, Mr Supercargo!" he addressed Timar. "We meet here again? You have not any more Turkish pashas in your ship? He! he! Don't be afraid, Mr Supercargo."

Timar shrugged his shoulders and said nothing. Then Theodor turned to Noémi, and put his arm caressingly round the girl's waist, who in answer to it pushed him away and turned her face from him.

"Leave the girl alone!" said Therese shortly, in a severe tone. "What do you want now?"

"There, there—don't turn me out of the house before I have got in. Is it not permissible to embrace my little bride? Noémi won't break if I look at her? What are you so afraid of me for?"

"We have good reason," said Therese, sullenly.

"Don't be angry, little mother. This time I have not come to get anything from you: I bring you something—a great, great deal of money. Ho, ho! a heap of money! So much that you could buy back your fine house that you once had, and the fields and gardens on the Ostrova island—in short, all that you have lost. You shall have it all again. I know that I, as a son, owe you the duty of making good all that you lost by my poor father's fault."

By this time Theodor had become so sentimental that he was shedding tears, but it left the spectators unmoved: they believed as little in his tears as in his laughter.

"Let us go in, into the room," said he, "for what I have to say is not for every ear."

"Don't talk such nonsense," Frau Therese

said, angrily. "What do you mean by 'every ear' here on this lonely island? You can say anything before Timar: he is an old friend—but go on. I know you are hungry, and that's what it all means."

"Ah, you dear good mother! how well you know your Theodor's little weakness of always having a splendid appetite. And you do so thoroughly understand the exquisite Greek *cuisine*, at sight of which one would wish to be all stomach. There is no such housekeeper in the world as you are. I have dined with the Sultan of Turkey, but he has no cook who can compare with you."

Frau Therese had the weakness of being sensitive to praise of her housekeeping. She never grudged good things to any guest, and even her deadly enemy she could not send empty away.

Theodor wore a so-called Figaro hat, which was then in fashion, and managed that the low doorway of the little cottage should knock it off his head, in order to be able to say, "Oh, these confounded new-fangled hats! but that's sure

to happen when one is used to high doorways. In my new house they are all folding-doors, and such a splendid view over the sea from my rooms."

"Have you then really a home anywhere?" asked Therese as she laid the table.

"I should think so! At Trieste, and in the finest palace in the town. I am agent to the principal shipbuilder."

"At Trieste?" interrupted Timar. "What's his name?"

"He turns out sea-going vessels," said Theodor, casting a contemptuous look at Timar. "He is not merely a barge-builder—and for that matter his name is Signor Scaramelli."

Timar was silent. He did not care to let out that he himself was having a large vessel built for the ocean trade by Scaramelli.

"I am just rolling in money!" bragged Theodor. "Millions and millions pass through my hands. If I were not such an honest man, I could save thousands for myself. I have bought something for my dear little Noémi, which I once promised her. What did I pro-

mise?—A ring. What sort of stone?—A ruby, an emerald? Well, it is a brilliant, a four-carat brilliant: it shall be our betrothal ring. Here it is." Theodor felt in his breeches-pocket, fumbled a long time, made at last a terrible grimace, and stared on the ground. "It is lost!" groaned he, turning his pocket out, and showing the treacherous hole through which the valuable engagement-ring with the four-carat diamond had escaped. Noémi broke into a hearty laugh. She had such a lovely ringing voice when she laughed, and one seldom had a chance of hearing it.

"But it is not lost!" cried Theodor; "you may spare your laughter, fair lady!" and he began to draw off his boot—and there really was the ring, which fell out of the turned-over top of the boot on to the tray.

"There it is! A good horse does not run away. My little Noémi's engagement-ring has never left me. Look now, Mama Therese—your future son-in-law has brought this for his bride; there, what do you say to that? And you, Mr Underwriter, if you understand

these things, what do you value this diamond at?"

Timar looked at the stone and said, "Paste. In the trade it is worth about five groschen."

"Hold your tongue, Supercargo! What do you know about it? You understand hay and maize, and perhaps never saw a diamond in your life."

And so saying, he placed the despised ring, which Noémi would on no account wear, on his little finger, and was busy all through the meal in showing it off. The young gentleman had a fine appetite. During dinner he talked very big about what a gigantic establishment this shipbuilder's was, and how many million square feet of wood were required every year. There were hardly any trees left in the neighbourhood fit for building ships. They had to be brought from America. There were only a few left in Sclavonia.

Only after he had dined well, he came out with the principal affair.

"And now, my dear lady, I will tell you what I have come about."

Therese looked at him with anxious distrust.

"Now I will make you all happy—you, as well as Noémi and myself. And besides, I can do Signor Scaramelli a good turn. That's enough for me. Says Scaramelli to me one day, "Friend Krisstyan, I say, you will have to go off to Brazil."

"If only you were there now!" sighed Therese.

Theodor understood and smiled. "You must know that from there comes the best wood for shipbuilding. The makaya and the murmuru tree, used for the keel; the poripont and patanova, from which the ribs are made; the royoc and grasgal trees, which do not decay in water; the 'mort-aux-rats' tree, the iron-wood for rudder-shafts, and sour-gum tree for paddle-floats; also the teak and mahogany for ship's fittings, and——"

"Pray, stop with your ridiculous Indian names," interrupted Therese; "you think you will turn my head by reeling out a whole botanical catalogue, so that I shan't see the wood for the trees. Tell me why—if there are

such incomparable trees in Brazil—why you are not there already?"

"Yes, but that's just where my grand idea comes in. Why, said I to Signor Scaramelli, should I travel to Brazil when we have plenty of wood close by even better than that of Brazil? I know an island in the middle of the Danube which is provided with a virgin forest, and where grow splendid trees, which can compete with those of South America."

"I thought so," murmured Therese to herself.

"The poplars take the place of the patanovas; the nut-trees far surpass mahogany, and those we have in hundreds on our island."

"My nut-trees!"

"The wood of the apple-tree is much better than that of the kaskarilla tree."

"Indeed; so you have already disposed of my apple-trees!"

"Plum-tree wood need not fear comparison with the best teak."

"And those too you would cut down and sell to Signor Scaramelli?" asked Frau Therese, quietly.

"We shall get a mint of money for them: at least ten gulden for each tree. Signor Scaramelli has given me *carte blanche*. He has left me free to make a contract with you. I have it in my pocket; you have only to sign and our fortune is made. And when once the useless trees here are cut down, we will not stay here, but go and live in Trieste. We will plant the whole island with 'Prunus mehaleb': you know they make Turkish pipe-stems from it. This tree requires no care: we need only keep one man here; he would sell the yearly crop of tubular stems to the merchants, and we should receive five hundred ducats for every rood—for ten roods five thousand ducats."

Timar could not suppress a smile. Speculations of such rashness had not occurred even to him.

"Well, what is there to laugh at?" Theodor said, in a lordly manner. "I know all about these things."

"And I understand too," said Therese, "what you want. As often as my unlucky star brings you here, you appear like a bird

of prey, and I may be sure that you have some malicious scheme against me. You know that you will not find any money with me, but you help yourself. Once before you came with a boat and carried off what we had saved for our own use, and turned it into money. Now you are no longer satisfied with the fruit of which you took tithes more jealously than any usurious Pasha: you want to sell the trees too over my head—those trees, my treasures, my only friends in the world, which I have planted and nurtured, which keep me, and under which I can rest. Fie! for shame! to tell me such stories of getting money for these trees, to build ships of them. For certain, you would only cut them down to sell them for a trifle to the nearest charcoal-burner—that is your splendid plan. Who are you going to take in? Not me, who know your cunning. I tell you, have done with your foolish tricks, or you may yet learn what is the use of Turkish pipe-stems!"

"No, no, Mama Therese, I am not thinking of joking; you may be sure I did not come

here for nothing: remember what day it is. It is my *fête*-day, and the day of my little darling Noémi's birth. You know my poor father and hers betrothed us to each other when we were little; they settled that as soon as Noémi was seventeen we should be united. I should have come from the ends of the earth for such a day as this. Here I am, with all the warmth of my loving heart; but people cannot live on love alone. It is true I get good pay from Signor Scaramelli, but that goes to the splendid furniture of my house in Trieste. You must give me something with Noémi, so that she may make an appearance consistent with her rank. The bride cannot enter the bridegroom's house with empty hands; she is your only daughter, and has a right to require of you that you should provide for her handsomely."

Noémi had sat down sulkily in a corner of the room, and remained with her back to the company, and her head against the wall.

"Yes," continued Theodor. "You must give Noémi a dowry. Do not be so selfish. Keep

half your trees, for all I care, and leave the other half to me; where and how I sell them is my affair. Give Noémi the nut-trees for a dowry: for those I have, really, a certain purchaser."

Therese had come to the end of her patience. "Listen, Theodor. I do not know whether to-day is your *fête* or not, but one thing I do know, that it is not Noémi's birthday. And yet more surely I know that Noémi will not marry you, if you were the only man on God's earth."

"Ha! ha! leave that to me — I am not afraid."

"Just as you like; but now, once for all, you shall never have my splendid nut-trees, if Noah's ark was to be built of them. One single tree I will give you, and that you can use for the end you will come to sooner or later. You say to-day is your *fête*-day, and that would be a good day to do it."

At these words Theodor rose, but not to go on his way — only to turn the chair he had been sitting on, and place himself astride on it, with his elbows on its back, and looking into

Therese's eyes he said, with provoking coolness—

"I must say you are very kind, Mamma Therese; you seem to have forgotten that if I say one word——"

"Say it then! You can speak freely before this gentleman: he knows everything."

"And that this island does not belong to you?"

"Yes."

"And that it would only cost me one word, either at Vienna or Constantinople——"

"To make us homeless and shelterless and beggars."

"Yes; I can do that!" cried Theodor Krisstyan, who, now showing his true colours, looked with greedy eyes at Therese and drew a paper from his pocket, which he held towards her. "Here is the agreement, and here is the date. You know what I can do, and I will do it, if you do not sign this contract immediately." Therese trembled.

"No, sir," said Timar, laying his hand gently on Theodor's shoulder. "You cannot do that."

"What?" asked he, throwing his head back defiantly.

"Lay information anywhere of the existence of this island, and of its unauthorised occupation."

"Why should I not do it?"

"Because another has already done it."

"You!" cried Theodor, raising his fist to Michael.

"You!" exclaimed Therese, pressing her hands to her brow.

"Yes; I," said Timar, steadily and calmly. "I have given information both at Vienna and in Constantinople, that here close to the Ostrova Island a nameless and uninhabited islet has been formed in the course of the last fifty years. Then I begged of the Vienna Government as well as of the Sublime Porte to leave me the usufruct of the islet for ninety years: as an acknowledgment of ownership, the Hungarian Government is to receive every year a sack of nuts, and the Sublime Porte a box of dried fruit. The patent in question and the Imperial firman are already in my hands."

Timar drew the two deeds out of the envelope he had received at his Baja office, and which had so much pleased him. When he became a great man, he had determined to procure comfort and peace for this poor storm-driven family. That sack of nuts and box of fruit had cost him large sums. "But," he concluded, "I hastened to transfer the rights thus obtained to the present inhabitants and colonists. Here is the official deed of settlement."

Therese fell speechless at Michael's feet. She could only sob and kiss the hands of the man who had freed her from this incarnate curse, and driven away the phantom which oppressed her heart by day and night.

Noémi held her two hands on her heart, as if afraid that it would cry aloud, and betray what her lips suppressed.

"You see then, Herr Theodor Krisstyan," said Michael, "that you have nothing to get on this island for the next ninety years."

Pale with rage, Theodor screamed, foaming at the mouth, "And who are you who dare to

meddle in the affairs of this family? What gives you a right to do it?"

"My love!" cried Noémi suddenly, with all the strength of overpowering passion, whilst she fell on Michael's breast, and threw her arms round his neck.

Theodor said not a word more. He shook his fist in silent rage at Timar, and rushed out of the room. In his look lay that hatred which does not hesitate to use a dagger, or to mix poison. But even when he was gone, the girl still held Timar's neck in her embrace.

CHAPTER V.

OUT OF THE WORLD.

WHAT induced Noémi to throw herself on Timar's breast and acknowledge openly that she loved him? Did she wish thus to banish for ever the man whose presence was hateful to her, and make it impossible for him any longer to desire her as his wife? Had this child of solitude no idea of the etiquette which demands that such feelings should be concealed in a maiden's breast? Or did she confuse love with the gratitude she could not help feeling towards the man who had freed her and her mother from anxiety, and won for their lifelong enjoyment the possession of this little paradise? Perhaps she was alarmed when she saw her tormentor feeling for a weapon, and had instinc-

tively thrown herself on her benefactor's breast to protect him from attack. She might have thought that this poor ship's captain, whose mother was as poor as her mother, had said that he had "no one" in the world; why should she not be "some one" to him? Would he have returned here if something had not attracted him, and if he cared for her why should she not love him?

No, no; no explanation, no reason, no excuse was needed; here was nothing but pure unselfish love.

She did not know why, she asked for no reason—she only loved. She loved without inquiring whether it was allowed by God and man, whether it would bring her joy or sorrow. She did not long to be happy or great, her lord's liege lady, crowned with the silver crown, and blessed by the Triune God—she only loved. She never thought of humiliation with bent head, she asked neither the protection of a husband nor the pity and forgiveness of God—she only loved. Such was Noémi.

Poor Noémi! what you must suffer for this!

. . . Michael had for the first time in his life heard it said that some one loved him. From real inclination, as a poor ship's captain in another man's service, without selfish interest, for his own sake alone. A miraculous warmth overflowed his heart, the warmth which will awake the dead from their long sleep at the Resurrection. He raised his hands timidly and trembling to the shoulders of the girl, and asked, with softly whispering voice, "And that is really true?"

The maiden moved the head which lay on his heart and nodded to him. "Yes; it is true."

Michael looked at Therese. She came towards them, and laid her hand on Noémi's head, as if to say, "Well then, love him!" It was a solemn and silent scene, in which each could hear the heart-beats of the other.

Therese broke the silence first. "If only you knew," she said to Timar, "how many tears the girl has shed for you. If you had seen her go daily up the rock, and look for hours over the quiet landscape, where you vanished from

her sight. If you had heard her whisper your name in her dreams!"

Noémi made a deprecating gesture with her hand, as if to entreat her mother to betray no more. But Michael only noticed it by drawing her closer to himself. See, here at last is one being in the wide world who knows how to love him; who in the "Man of Gold" loves the man and not the gold. And it seemed to him as if he had been in banishment, as long as he had walked through the world, and only now had found a new earth and new heaven, and in them a new life. He bent to kiss the girl's brow, and felt her heart throb against his.

And around him were only springing flowers, fragrant shrubs, humming bees, and singing birds, which all proclaimed "Thou shalt love!" Speechless bliss led them out into the air, and when they looked into each other's eyes, both thought, "How wonderful! thine eyes are the same colour as mine." The brilliant sky and the fragrant earth had agreed to enthrall them—their own inclination completed the spell. When a child who has never loved, and a man who has

never been loved, meet each other, how is it likely to be with them?

The day drew to a close, but they had not yet been satisfied with joy. The evening fell, the moon rose. Noémi led Michael to the top of the rock, whence she had once looked after the departing guest with tears. There Timar sat down amongst the sweet lavender; Noémi placed herself beside him, and leant her curly golden head on the arm of the man, whose enraptured face was raised to the sky. Therese stood behind them and looked down smiling. The silver moon shone radiant from the golden-dusky vault, and the tempting phantom spoke, "Behold this treasure! it belongs to you. You found it; it gave itself to you and is yours. You had obtained all except love, only that was wanting, and now you have found that too. Take, enjoy to the dregs, the cup which the Almighty has given you. You will become a new man! The man whom a woman loves becomes a demi-god. You are happy; you are beloved." . . . Only the inner voice whispered, "You are a thief!"

. . . . . .

With the first kiss a new world had arisen for Michael; a wonderful change had taken place in his soul. The first feeling which overpowered him was a secret dread, a fear of happiness; should he submit to it or fly from it? Does a blessing or a curse rest on it? does it bring life or death? what follows on it? What deity will answer these questions? The flower is answered when it unfolds its cup, the butterfly when it opens its wings, the bird when it builds its nest; but not the man when he asks, "Is it good or evil to follow the call of my heart?"

And his heart said, "Look in her eyes!" It is not sinful to be transported by a glance of the eye, and this intoxication lasts. Michael forgot the whole world when he looked in her eyes; a new creation arose for him, full of bliss and joy and earthly happiness. The exquisite presentiment stupefied him.

Since his youth no one had loved him. He had once hoped for affection, struggled for it with might and main, and when he thought he

was at the goal, his joy was turned to ashes by crushing disappointment. And here to his face he is told that he is beloved. Everything tells him so; the animals which lick his hand, the lips which betray the heart's secret, the blush and the glance which tell more than the mouth. Even she who ought to guard the secret jealously, the mother of the loving girl, even she betrays it,—"She loves so passionately that it will be her death!"

No; that it shall not be. . . .

Timar passed on the island one of those days which outweigh an eternity. A day full of endless feeling. A day of self-forgetfulness and waking dreams, when what a man has longed for in visions of the night actually stands before him.

But when on the third night, after a season of ideally rapturous intercourse, he returned from the moon-lit world of enchantment to his solitary dark bedroom, the inward accuser, who would not be silenced or lulled to sleep, called him to account.

This voice would not let him sleep. He

was restless all night, and dawn found him out under the trees; his decision was made—he would go away and not come back for a long time, till he was forgotten. Till he also had forgotten that he had lived three days in Elysium, that he had been permitted to know happiness.

When the sun rose, he had been round the whole island, and when he got back he found Frau Therese and her daughter busy preparing breakfast.

"I must go away to-day," said Michael to Therese.

"So soon," whispered Noémi.

"He has a great deal to do," said Therese to her daughter.

This was only natural enough. A captain is only a servant who must look after his affairs, and not waste the time for which he must account to his employer.

He was not pressed to stay—it was quite right that he should leave. He will come back, and they have plenty of time to wait for him—one year, two years, till the hour

of death, till eternity. But Noémi did not touch her glass of new milk: she could not have swallowed a drop. He must not be detained; if he has business he must go and attend to it. Therese herself brought out his gun and knapsack, and said to Noémi, "You carry the gun, that Almira may not hurt it. Go with him to the boat."

Timar walked silently beside Noémi; the girl's hand rested in his; suddenly she stood still. Michael did so too, and looked in her eyes. "You want to ask me something?" he said. The girl thought a while, then she said, "No; nothing." Timar had learnt to read her eyes; he guessed her thoughts. Noémi had wanted to ask him, "Tell me, my beloved, my all, what has become of the white-faced girl who once came with you to the island, and was called Timéa?"

But she said nothing, only walked on silently with his hand in hers.

Michael's heart was heavy when they said good-bye. When Noémi gave him his gun she whispered to him, "Take care of yourself,

that no harm may come to you;" and when she pressed his hand, she looked at him once more with those heavenly blue and soul-full eyes, and said, with a voice of entreaty, "You will return?"

Michael was fascinated by the entreating voice. He pressed the child to him and murmured—"Why don't you say 'Wilt not *thou* return?' Why am I never to hear *thou?*"

The girl cast down her eyes and gently shook her head. "Do say 'thou,'" he begged once more. She hid her face on Michael's breast, but would not do his will.

"So you cannot, or will not, call me 'thou'?—one single word—are you afraid?" The maiden covered her face with both hands, and was silent. "Noémi, I beg of thee say that one little word and make me happy. Do not let me go without it."

But she shook her head silently, and could not utter it.

"Then farewell to you, dear Noémi," faltered Michael, and sprang into his boat. The rushes of the marsh soon hid the island from his

gaze. But as long as he could distinguish its woods, he still saw the girl leaning on an acacia-tree, sadly gazing out with her head on her hand; but she did not call after him the desired word.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TROPIC OF CAPRICORN.

After Michael had rowed across to the other side, he gave over the boat to a fisherman to keep till he came back. But would he ever come back?

He wished to go on foot as far as the wharf, where Fabula was busy with the lading of his ships. It is hard work to row against the stream, and in Timar's present frame of mind he was in no mood for muscular exertion; there was in his heart a stronger current, to contend against which he needed all his strength.

The district through which he had to pass was a wide-spread alluvial deposit of the Danube, like those found in the lower reaches of the river. The capricious stream has burst

some dam, and altered its course. Every year it tears portions from one bank and carries them over to the other. On this deposit the trees uprooted with it form a new growth, and through this dark natural forest wind lonely paths — the roads of the osier-cutters and fisher-folk. Here and there you come to a forsaken hut with a shingle roof, whose walls are covered with creepers. These sometimes shelter a snipe-shooter, conceal a robber, or form the lair of a wolf and her cubs.

Michael, deep in thought, strode silently on through this desert: he had thrown his gun over his shoulder.

"You can never return here," said Timar to himself. "If it is difficult to carry through one lie with consistency, how can you manage two?—two contradictory lies? If you accept Noémi's love, you will be inseparably bound to her, and must live henceforth two lives, both full of deceit. . . . You are no boy, to be passion's tool, and perhaps it is not passion which you feel, possibly merely a passing desire or only gratified vanity.

"Then the rejected bridegroom—how is he to be got rid of? He would kill you, or you him—a delightful relationship indeed to end on the scaffold!"

He took off his hat and wiped the sweat from his brow; it soothed his burning temples to let the breeze fan them.

"Am I never to be happy?" he sighed. "All these years I have worked early and late for other people, why should I be so wretched? I adored my wife, and her coldness has brought me to despair; but Noémi loves me. That can no longer be altered, and in the island, outside the world, the laws of society and religion have no power. . . . I could easily pay off that fellow who comes between us, and then I could live here in peace for half the year. Timéa would only suppose that I was away on business."

The wind of spring rustled through the young poplar stems. Here, where the path turned, stood a hut made of interwoven osier-twigs, whose entrance was concealed by brambles. Timar stood still and put on his

hat. At that moment two shots rattled close to him, the two balls whistling over his head with that unpleasant sound which resembles the buzz of an approaching wasp, or the clang of an Eolian harp. Michael's hat, pierced by two balls, flew from his head into the bushes. Both shots came from the ruined hut. For the first instant the shock paralysed his limbs; they came like two answers to his secret thoughts. A shudder ran through his whole body: the next moment rising fury took the place of fear; he lowered his gun, cocked both barrels, and rushed angrily towards the hut, from which the smoke of the discharged weapon poured through the crevices.

Before the muzzle of his gun stood a trembling man — Theodor Krisstyan. His discharged pistol was still in his hand, he held it now as a protection to his head, and shook so that every limb quivered.

"It is you—you!" cried Michael.

"Mercy!" stammered the trembling wretch, throwing away his pistol, and stretching both hands entreatingly to Michael: his knees

knocked together, and he could hardly keep his feet; his face was pale as death, his eyes dull; he was more dead than alive. Timar recovered his composure: fear and anger had left him—he lowered his gun. "Come nearer," he said to the assassin.

"I dare not," faltered he, clinging to the wood-work. "You will kill me."

"Don't be afraid; I don't want your life. There"—he discharged his gun in the air—"now I am unarmed, and you have no cause to fear." Theodor crept out. "You wanted to kill me," said Michael. "You wretched creature! I pity you!"

The young rascal dared not look at him.

"Theodor Krisstyan, so young, and already a murderer!—but you could not do it. Examine yourself; you are not naturally bad, but your soul has been envenomed: I know your history, and I make excuses. You have good capacities, and use them badly—you are a vagabond and a swindler; does such a life content you? Impossible!—begin afresh—shall I help you to a post in which you can, with your

education, honestly support yourself? I have many connections; it is in my power: there is my hand on it."

The murderer fell on his knees before the man he would have killed, seized the offered hand with both his own, and covered it, sobbing, with kisses.

"Oh, sir, you are the first man who has ever spoken thus to me; let me kneel at your feet! From boyhood I have been chased from every door like a dog without a master; I had to steal or beg every morsel I ate; no one gave me a hand but those who were worse than myself, and who led me further astray. I have led a shameful miserable life, full of deceit and treachery, and I tremble before any one who knows me; and you hold out a hand to me—you, for whom I have been lying in wait like a brigand, you will save me from myself! Let me kneel before you, and thus receive your commands!"

"Stand up! I am no friend to sentiment; tears make me suspicious."

"You are right!" said Theodor, "and especi-

ally with such a well-known actor as I am, who if you say to him 'Take that groschen and cry,' could at once break into floods of tears. Now people don't believe me if I really weep; I will suppress my tears."

"All the more because I do not intend to address a moral lecture to you, but only to speak of very dry business matters. You spoke of your connection with Scaramelli, and a business journey to Brazil."

"All lies, sir."

"So I thought. You have no connection with Scaramelli?"

"I had, but it was broken off."

"Did you run away, or were you dismissed?"

"The former."

"With trust-money?"

"With three or four hundred gulden."

"Say five hundred. Would you not be glad to return them to the firm? I have relations with their house."

"I do not want to remain there."

"And what connection has this with the Brazilian journey?"

"There is not a word of truth in it; no ship-wood comes from there."

"Not even those you mentioned, amongst which were dye and chemical woods?"

Theodor smiled. "The truth is, that I wanted to sell the trees of the ownerless island to a charcoal-burner to get a little money; Therese guessed at once my real object."

"Then you did not come to the island for Noémi's sake?"

"Oh, I have as many wives as the countries I have visited."

"H'm—I know of a very good situation for you in Brazil, an agency for a lately commenced enterprise, where a knowledge of the Hungarian, German, Italian, English, and Spanish languages is necessary."

"I speak and write all these languages."

"I know it—and also Greek, Turkish, Polish, and Russian: you are a clever fellow. I will procure for you this situation, in which you can make use of your talents. The agency of which I speak carries with it a salary of three thousand dollars, and a percentage of the

profits, the amount of which will depend on yourself."

Theodor could hardly believe his ears. But he was so accustomed to pretence that when he was overcome by real gratitude he had not the courage to give it expression, lest it should be taken for acting.

"Is this your real meaning, sir?"

"What motive should I have at this moment for jesting with you? You attempted my life, and I must secure myself. I cannot send you out of the world—my conscience forbids it—so I must try to make an honest man of you in the interest of my own safety. If you are in good circumstances, I shall have nothing to fear. Now you can understand my course of action. As a proof that my offer is in earnest, take my pocket-book. You will find in it the necessary journey expenses to Trieste, and probably as much as what you owe to Scaramelli. At Trieste you will find a letter which gives you further directions. And now we will part—one to the right, and the other to the left."

Theodor's hand shook as he received the

pocket-book. Michael lifted his pierced hat from the ground. "And you can look on these shots just as you like. If they were the attack of an assassin, you have every reason not to approach me in any region within reach of the law; but if they were the shots of an insulted gentleman, you know that at our next meeting it is my turn to shoot."

Theodor Krisstyan bared his breast, and exclaimed passionately, "Shoot me if ever I come in sight of you again! Shoot me like a mad dog!" He raised the discharged pistol, and pressed it into Timar's hand. "Shoot me with my own pistol if you ever meet me in this world! Do not ask, say not a word, but kill me!"

He insisted on Michael's taking the pistol, and putting it in his pocket.

"Farewell!" said Timar, and then he left him and went on his way.

Theodor stood still looking after him. Then he ran, and caught him up. "Sir, one word—you have made a new man of me—allow me, if ever I write to you, to begin with the words,

'My Father.' In those words once lay for me shame and horror; let me find in them henceforth a fountain of trust and happiness—my father, my father!"

He kissed Michael's hand with impassioned warmth, rushed away, threw himself down on the grass behind the first bush that hid him from Timar's eyes, and wept—real true tears.

. . . . . .

Poor little Noémi stood for an hour under the acacia-tree where she had taken leave of Michael. Therese, as she stayed out so long, had gone to seek her, and now sat beside her daughter on the grass. Not to be idle, she had brought out her knitting.

Suddenly Noémi exclaimed, "Mother, did you hear?—two shots on the other shore!"

They listened. There was deep stillness in the drowsy air.

"Two more shots! Mother, what is it?"

Therese tried to calm her. "They must be sportsmen, child, who are shooting there."

Noémi's cheeks lost their colour, and she looked as pale as the acacia-blossoms over her

head. She pressed her hands vehemently to her breast and faltered, "Oh, no, no! he will never come back!"

It grieved her to the heart that she had not said the little word "thou" to him when he begged so hard.

. . . . . .

"Master Fabula," said Timar to his faithful steward, "this year we will not send the crop either to Raab or Komorn."

"What shall we do with it, then?"

"We will grind it here. I have two windmills on my property, and we can hire thirty water-mills; those will suffice."

"Then we must open a huge warehouse, where we can sell such a quantity."

"That will not be wanting. We will load the flour into small ships, which can go up to Karlstadt; thence we will transfer it in barrels to Brazil."

"To Brazil!" screamed Fabula, quite frightened. "I can't go there with it."

"I was not thinking of sending you there, Master Fabula; your department is the grind-

ing and the transport to Trieste. I will give the agents and millers their orders to-day, and you can scold and manage in my absence just as if I were there."

"Many thanks," said Master Fabula, and shook his head violently as Herr von Levetinczy left the office. "That will be a gigantic folly," he grumbled to himself. "To begin with, the flour will be musty before it arrives; then no one will buy it; thirdly, nobody will ever see the colour of money which has to come from Brazil. How could he claim it? there is no fiscal authority there, or even a vice-consul. In short, it is just another of those colossal everlasting pieces of folly of our Herr Levetinczy; but it will turn out well, to every one's surprise, as every stupid thing does that our master undertakes. And I don't doubt that our flour-ships will come back laden with gold-dust from Brazil; but for all that it is a great folly."

Our Herr Fabula was perfectly right. Timar was of the same opinion. He ran a risk in this speculation of losing at least a

hundred thousand gulden. But this idea was not of to-day. It had long been in his mind whether a Hungarian merchant might not make better profits than in grain-contracts and the chartering of cargo-ships. Would it not be possible for those goods which have to struggle with foreign competition to find their own place in the great bazaar of the world's market?

The export trade in flour was an old plan of his. To prepare for its execution he had completed his mills, and built a large vessel at Trieste. But the reason of his hasty determination to begin work at once was only on Noémi's account; and his meeting with Theodor had brought this decision to a head.

This business was only a pretext; the principal thing was to put a hemisphere between himself and that man. Those who saw in what ceaseless labour Timar spent the next weeks,—how he hurried from one mill to another, and from there to his ships; how he despatched them the moment they were laden, and personally superintended the transport,—all said, "What a pattern of a merchant! He is tre-

mendously rich; he has directors, agents, captains, stewards, overseers, foremen; and yet he sees to all himself like a common contractor. He understands business." (If only they had known what depended on this business!)

Three weeks passed before the first ship laden with barrels of Hungarian flour lay ready to weigh anchor in the harbour of Trieste. The ship was called "Pannonia"; it was a beautiful three-masted galliot. Even Master Fabula was loud in its praise; for he was present at the loading of the flour. But Timar himself never saw it; he had not once come to Trieste to see it before it started. During those weeks he remained in Levetinczy or Pancsova. The whole enterprise was in Scaramelli's name; Timar had his reasons for keeping his own name out of it; and he only communicated in writing with the fully empowered firm of Scaramelli.

One day he received a letter from Theodor Krisstyan. When he opened it he was surprised to find money in it—a hundred-gulden note. The contents of the letter ran thus:—

"My Father,—When you read these lines I shall be afloat on board the splendid ship Pannonia, as Brazilian agent of the house of Scaramelli.

"Accept my warmest thanks for your kind recommendation. The bank has advanced me two months' salary, of which I enclose a hundred gulden, with the request that you would be good enough to pay it over to the landlord of The White Ship at Pancsova. I am in debt to that amount to that poor man, and am thankful to be able to pay this sum. Heaven bless you for all your goodness to me!"

Timar breathed freely. "The man has already improved; he remembers his old debts and pays them with his savings. What a sweet thought to have brought a lost sheep back to the fold—to be the saviour of an enemy who attempted one's life—to give back to him life, the world, honour, and bring to light a pearl purified of the mire in which it lay! Is not this a truly Christian act? You have a generous soul. If only the inward accuser would not reply, 'You are a murderer!'

"You do not rejoice to have saved a man, but rather at getting rid of him. If you received news that a tornado had caught your ship and sunk it with every soul on board, what joy it would give you! You are not thinking of the flour-trade with its profits and losses, but that every year in the swamps of La Plata and the river Amazon that fearful spectre walks,—the yellow fever,—which, like the tiger, lies in ambush for the new-comer. Of every hundred, sixty fall victims to it. It is that of which the prospect gives you pleasure. You are a murderer!"

Timar felt the satisfaction of a man who has succeeded in putting an enemy out of the way —a joy with which bitter self-condemnation and anxious forebodings were mingled.

. . . . . .

From henceforward Timar was transformed. He was hardly to be recognised. The usually cold-blooded man betrayed in everything a singular restlessness; he gave contradictory orders, and forgot an hour after what he had said. If he started on a journey he turned back half-way;

he began to avoid business, and seemed indifferent to the most important affairs; then again he grew so excitable that the smallest neglect enraged him. He might be seen wandering on the shore for half a day at a time, with his head down like one who is nearly mad, and begins by running away from home. Another time he shut himself into his room and would not let any one in; the letters which came to him from all parts lay unopened in a heap on his table. This shrewd clever man could think of nothing but the golden-haired girl whom he had seen for the last time leaning on a tree by the island shore, with her head supported on her arm. One day he determined to return to her, and the next to drive the remembrance of her from his breast. He began to be superstitious; he waited for signs from heaven, and visions to decide what he should do. Dreams always brought the same face, happy or sad, submissive or inconsolable, and he was more crazy than ever. But heaven sent him no sign.

One day he decided to be reasonable and attend to his business affairs; that might perhaps

steady his brain. He sat down before the heap of letters and began to open them all in turn. All that came of it was that he had forgotten at the end of a letter what he had read at the beginning. He only cared to read what was written in those blue eyes. But his heart began to beat fast when a letter fell into his hands which was heavier than the rest; he knew the handwriting of the address; it was Timéa's.

His blood ran cold. This was the sign from heaven, this will decide the conflict in his soul.

Timéa writes to him—the angelic creature, the spotless wife. A single tender word from her will exercise an influence on her husband like a cry of "danger" to a drunken man. These well-known characters will call up the saintly face before his mind's eye, and lead him back to the right path.

In the letter is a small object; it must be a loving surprise, a little souvenir. Yes! to-morrow is her husband's birthday. This will be a charming letter, a sweet remembrance. Michael opened the envelope very carefully,

after cutting round the seal. The first thing that surprised him was a key which fell out—the key of his writing-table.

But in the letter were these words: "MY DEAR SIR,—You left the key of your writing-table in the lock. That you may not be uneasy about it, I send it to you. God keep you!—TIMÉA."

Nothing further. Timar had forgotten to take out the key that night when he came home secretly, when the conversation with Athalie had so disturbed his mind.

Nothing but the key and a couple of frigid lines. Timar put down the letter in vexation.

Suddenly a dreadful idea flashed through his mind. If Timéa found this key in his writing-table lock, perhaps she looked through the desk. Women are curious, and do such things. But if she did search in it, she must have found something she would recognise. When Timar disposed of Ali Tschorbadschi's treasures, he had been careful not to part with some objects, which, if they came into the trade, might have led to discovery; but had, for the most part, only sold the separate diamonds.

Amongst the precious objects was a medallion framed in brilliants, which contained a miniature portrait of a young lady, whose features bore a striking likeness to those of Timéa. It must be the picture of her mother, who had been a Greek. If Timéa found this medallion she must know all; she would at once recognise her mother's portrait, and conclude that this jewel had belonged to her father. This would lead her to the further conclusion that her mother's valuables had fallen into Timar's hands, and thus she would arrive at the whole knowledge of how he had become rich, and that he had married her at the price of her own money. If Timéa was curious, she now knows all, and then she must despise her husband.

And do not the words of the letter betray this? Does not the wife wish her husband to understand, by the forwarding of the key, that she had discovered his secrets?

This thought was decisive to Michael as to whether his path was to lead up or down! Down!

It is all one, thought he. I am unmasked before the woman. I can no longer play the honest man, the true-hearted, generous benefactor. I am found out. I can only sink lower still!

He was determined to return to the island. But he would not retreat like a defeated foe. He wrote to Timéa, and begged her to open all the letters which should come during his absence, to inform his agents of their contents, and, where a decision was necessary, to dispose, in the name of her husband, of all as she chose. At the same time he sent the key back, that it might be at hand if any documents were wanted.

This was his trump card. With the feeling that his secret was near discovery he hastened to lead up to it, and possibly that very thing might prevent its revelation. He left orders to his agents that all letters concerning his affairs were to be directed to his wife. He was going away for a long time, but he did not say where to.

Late in the afternoon he started in a hired carriage. He hoped his track would be lost,

and did not take his own horses. A couple of days ago he had been superstitious and awaited signs from heaven, from the elements, to show him the way. Now he noticed them no longer. He was determined to return to the island. But the sky and the elements tried to frighten him by evil omens, and even to detain him by force. Towards evening, when the long lines of poplars on the Danube shore were already in sight, suddenly a reddish-brown cloud appeared in the sky, approaching with great rapidity. The peasant driver began to pray and sigh, but when the smoke-like cloud drew nigh, his prayers changed to curses. The Galambocz gnats are coming!

These are creations of the Evil One, trillions in number, and living in the holes of the Galambocz rocks: suddenly they come out in swarms, forming a thick cloud, and if they descend into the plain, woe to the cattle they find in the open!

The flight of gnats covered the plain through which Timar had to drive; the tiny stinging plague swarmed over the bodies of the horses,

creeping into their eyes, ears, and nostrils. The terrified animals could no longer be controlled—they turned round suddenly with the carriage, and bolted in a north-westerly direction. Timar ventured on a jump from the carriage; he leapt cleverly and safely without injury; the horses flew off and away. If he had attended to omens, this might have been sufficient to turn him also aside. But he was now obstinate. He was going on a road where man no longer asks for help from God. He was going where Noémi drew him and Timéa drove him. North-pole and south-pole, desire and his own will, pressed him on.

When he jumped from the carriage, he continued his journey on foot, keeping along the wooded river bank. His gun had remained in the carriage, he had come with empty hands; he cut himself a walking-stick, and that was his only weapon: provided with this, he tried to make his way through the thicket. There he lost himself; night surprised him, and the more he wandered the less he found an outlet. At last he came on a hut built of

osier-twigs, and decided to spend the night there.

He made a fire out of the dry branches lying near: fortunately he was carrying his game-bag when he jumped from the carriage, and in it were bread and ham; he broiled the ham over the fire and ate it with the bread.

He found also something else in the bag, the pistol with which Theodor had attacked him from the hut; perhaps from this very hut—quite possible that it was the same. He could make no use of the pistol, for he had left his powder-horn in the carriage; but it did him a service by strengthening him in his fatalism: a man who had escaped so many dangers must still have some work to do in the world. And indeed he required some encouragement, for after nightfall it began to be uncanny here in the desert. Not far away wolves were howling, and through the bushes Timar saw the shining green eyes; one and another old Sir Isegrim came up to the back wall of the hut and executed a fearful howl. Timar dared not let the fire out all night, for it alone kept away

the wild beasts. When he went inside, the uncomfortable hiss with which snakes receive human beings struck his ear, and a sluggish mass moved under his foot; perhaps he had trodden on a tortoise. Timar kept up the fire all night, and drew fantastic figures in the air with the glowing end of the fire-stick—perhaps the hieroglyphics of his own thoughts.

What a miserable night! He who has a home provided with every luxury, and a comfortable bed; in whose house rules a lovely young woman whom he can call his wife,—spends a lonely night in a damp fungus-grown hut: wolves howl round him, and over his head adders creep slowly through the rush-woven roof. And to-day is his birthday; a happy family festival indeed — in such surroundings! But they suit him — he wants nothing else.

Michael had a pious mind. From childhood he had been used night and morning to put up a silent prayer. He had never lost the habit, and in every danger or trouble of his eventful life, he had taken refuge in prayer.

He believed in God; God was his deliverer, and whatever he undertook succeeded. But in this dreadful night he dared not pray; he would not speak with God.

"Do not Thou look where I go." From this birthday he gave up prayer. He defied fate.

When the day dawned, the nocturnal beasts of prey slunk back to their lairs. Timar left his inhospitable refuge, and soon found the path which led direct to the shore of the Danube: here a new horror awaited him. The Danube was enormously swollen, and had overflowed its banks. It was the season of the spring floods after the melting of the snow; the foaming yellow stream was filled with uprooted reeds and tree-trunks. The fisherman's hut which he sought, and which stood on the point of a hill, was in the water up to the threshold, and the boat he had left there was tied to a tree close by.

He found not a creature there. It is impossible to fish in such a flood, and the people had removed all their nets. If he wanted a sign from heaven, a direction from God's finger,—

here he had it. The swollen river barred his way with its whole majestic strength; at such times no one ventures on the river: the warning was there, the elements commanded him to return.

"Too late," said Timar. "I cannot go back, I must go on."

The door of the hut was locked, and he broke it open to get at his oars, as he saw through a chink that they were kept there. Then he got into the boat, tied himself in, loosed the boat, and pushed off. The current seized him at once, and rushed on with him. The Danube was at that time a powerful master, and uprooted forests in its rage; a mortal venturing on its surface was like a worm floating on a straw, and yet this worm defied it. He alone managed the two oars, which also served to steer with. On the rapid waves his skiff danced like a nutshell, but the wind was contrary, and tried to drive him back to the shore he came from. But Timar succumbed neither to wind nor water.

He had thrown his hat to the bottom of the

boat; his hair, wet with perspiration, fluttered in the wind, and the waves splashing over the side threw their icy spray in his face—but they did not cool him. The thought was hot within him that Noémi might be in danger on the island. But the idea did not paralyse his arms. The Danube and the wind are two mighty powers — but stronger still are the passions and the will of man. Timar felt this. What activity in his mind, what muscle in his arm! It was a superhuman task in which he succeeded, to cross the current at the head of the Ostrova Island. Here he rested a while.

The island of Ostrova was overflowed, the water was rushing amongst the trees. Here it was easier to get on, by pushing his oars against the trunks; at the back of Ostrova he must let himself float down-stream to arrive at the ownerless island. When he had reached the right spot, and came out from amongst the trees, a new and surprising spectacle lay before him. The ownerless island was usually hidden behind a thick bed of osiers, over which only the tree-tops were visible; now none of the

CHAPTER VII.

SWEET HOME.

THE waves carried off Michael's boat. That of the islanders, which had brought them here, had long rotted away, and they had never had another. The new-comer could not leave the island before the first fruit-dealers arrived. Before that time weeks and months must elapse.

Happy weeks, happy moons! Uncounted days of unbroken joy! The ownerless island was Timar's home. There he found work and rest. After the flood had passed away, the work of getting rid of the water left in the hollows gave him plenty to do. The whole day he was busy digging canals to carry it away; his hands looked like a labourer's from

the blisters with which they were covered. When he threw spade and pick over his shoulder in the evening, and came back to the little cottage, he was met afar off, and lovingly welcomed. And when he had finished his canal and drawn off the marshy water, he looked upon his work as proudly as if it was the only one in all his life which could lay claim to be called a good action, and which he could confidently submit to his inward judge. The day of the opening of this canal was a festival on the little island. They had no church festivals and did not count Sundays: their saints' days were those on which God gave them some special joy.

These islanders were sparing of words. What the holy David said in one hundred and fifty psalms, was by them expressed in a sigh, and what the poets have sung of love in all their verses, one glance of the eye was sufficient to tell; they learnt to read each other's thoughts on the brow, they learnt to think together.

Michael admired Noémi more every day. She was a faithful, grateful creature; she

knew no care nor anxiety for the future; happy herself, she diffused happiness around. She never asked him, "What will become of me when you go? Will you leave me or take me? Is it good for me to love you? What Church has given you its priestly blessing? Ought you to be mine? Has no other a right to you? What are you out there in the world? What sort of world do you live in?" Even in her face, her eyes, he never read a disquieting doubt—ever and only the one question, "Lovest thou me?"

Frau Therese reminded Michael one day that he was tarrying long here; but he assured her that Master Fabula was looking after everything, and when Therese looked at Noémi, whose soft blue eyes ever turned like the sunflowers to the sun of Michael's face, she could only sigh, "Oh, how she loves him!"

Timar found it very necessary to dig all day, to drive piles, and bind fascines, in order by hard bodily labour to calm his even more heavily tasked mind. What is going on in the world? Thirty of his ships float on the

Danube, and a fleet on the sea: his whole wealth, a property of more than a million, all lies in the hands of a woman. And if this woman in some giddy mood squanders the whole and scatters it to the winds, ruining her husband and his house, could he reproach any one? Was it not by his own will? He was happy here at home, and yet would have liked to know what was going on over there. His spirit lived in two places, was torn in two parts: there, his money, his honour, his position in the world; here, his love held him fast. In truth he could have got away. The Danube is not a sea, he was a good swimmer, and could at any time have reached the opposite shore; no one would have detained him. They knew he had work to do out in the world. But when he was with Noémi he forgot again everything outside her arms; he was sunk in love, bliss, and wonder.

"Oh, do not love me so much!" whispered the girl to him.

And so day after day passed by. The time of fruit-ripening drew near, and the branches

were weighed down by their sweet burden. It was a pleasure to watch the daily progress of the fruit, how every day it developed more. Pears and apples began to put on their distinctive colours; the green is tanned to a leathery yellow, or receives gold and red streaks. The brown tone colours purple on the sunny side. In the golden tint mingle carmine splashes, and in the carmine greenish specks; the scented fruit smiles at one like a merry childish face. Timar helped the women to gather it. They filled great baskets with this blessing of heaven. He counted every apple he threw into the basket, how many hundreds, how many thousands. What a treasure! Real gold!

One afternoon, when he was helping Noémi to carry a full basket to the apple-room, he saw strangers arrive at the cottage: the fruit-buyers had come, the first visitors for many months past, bringing tidings from the outer world.

They negotiated about the fruit with Therese —the usual system of barter. Frau Therese

wanted as usual to have grain in exchange, but the pedlars would not give her as much as before. They said wheat had become very dear. The corn-merchants of Komorn had made large purchases and driven up the prices; they ground it themselves, and sent it over the seas. Therese would not believe this—it was only gossip of the fruit-hawkers; but Timar paid great attention to it. That was his idea; what had come of it since then? Now he had no more rest for thinking of business and the cares of property. This news was to him what the bugle-call is to an old soldier, who at the sound wishes himself back in the battle-field, even from the arms of his beloved.

The islanders thought it quite natural that Michael should make preparations to leave them. His business called him; and then he would return the following spring. Noémi only begged him not to throw away the clothes she had spun and woven for him, and which he had worn while with her. He will preserve them like a jewel.

And then he must often think of his poor Noémi. To that he could not answer in words.

He bribed the fruit-women to stay a day longer. And all that day he did nothing but visit, arm in arm with Noémi, all the places which had been witnesses of his tranquil happiness; here he plucked from a tree, and there from a flowery cluster, some leaflet to keep as a memorial. On every leaf and petal whole romances were written which only two people could read.

The last day passed so quickly! The boatmen wanted to leave in the evening, so as to row while it was cool. Michael must say farewell. Noémi was sensible, and did not cry; she knew he would return, and was more occupied in making provision to fill his knapsack.

"It will be dark when you get to the other side," she said, with tender anxiety. "Have you any arms?"

"No. No one will hurt me."

"But yet—here is a pistol in your haver-

sack," said Noémi, and drew it out; and then her cheek paled, for she recognised Theodor's pistol, with which he had often, when he came to the island, bragged and threatened that he would shoot Almira. "This is *his* weapon!" Timar was struck by the expression of her face.

"When you left here," said the girl, who was all excitement, "he watched for you on the other side, and shot at you with this pistol."

"What makes you think such a thing?"

"I heard the two shots, and then yours. So it was this pistol that you took from him?" Timar was surprised that love can see what the eye cannot reach. He could not tell a lie. "Did you kill him?" asked the girl.

"No."

"What has become of him?"

"You need fear him no longer. He is gone to Brazil; a hemisphere lies between us and him."

"I wish there were only three feet of earth between us!" cried Noémi impetuously, seizing Michael's hand.

Michael looked in her face surprised. "You! you! with such murderous thoughts — you, who cannot bear to see a chicken killed, who cannot bring yourself to tread on a spider, or to stick a butterfly on a pin!"

"But any one who would tear you from me, I could kill, were he a man, a devil, or an angel——!"

And she pressed the dearly beloved man to her breast in a passionate embrace. He trembled and glowed.

. . . . . .

On reaching the other side Michael again visited the fisherman's hut.

Two things occupied his mind: the slender figure amongst the evening mists on the flower-crowned rock, waving to him its tender farewells; and then that other figure conjured up by his imagination as it looks at home in Komorn. Well, he will have time to picture this image to himself on the long journey from the lower Danube up to Komorn.

When the old fisherman saw Michael he began to sigh (fishing-folk do not swear). "Just

think, my lord, some rascal of a thief has stolen your boat during the floods: he broke into the hut and carried off the oars. What thieves there are in the world, to be sure!"

It did Timar good that at last some one should call him a thief to his face; that was what he was—and if he had stolen nothing more than a boat! "We must not condemn the man," said he to the fisherman. "Who knows what danger he was in, or how much he needed a boat. We will get another. But now, my friend, we will get into your boat and try to arrive at the ferry to-night."

The fisherman was persuaded by a promise of liberal payment to undertake this, and by daylight they had reached the ferry where the ships generally took in their cargo. There were post-carriages at the inn on the bank, of which Timar engaged one to take him to Levetinczy. He thought he would there receive reports from the agent of what had passed during the last five months, so that when he got home to Komorn nothing new or surprising should greet him.

There was a one-storeyed residence on the estate at Levetinczy. In one wing lived the steward and his wife, while the other was given up to Timar. A staircase from this wing led to the park, and by this means he could gain access to the room which he had chosen as an office. Michael must pay attention to the trivial details if he wished to carry out his wearisome deceit consistently. He has been absent for five months, and has, of course, been a long way; but that hardly agrees with his arrival without luggage. In his knapsack there is only the suit of striped linen made for him by Noémi, for the suit in which he had gone to the island was intended for the cold season, and that, by now, was torn and worn out; his boots were patched. It would be difficult to account for his appearance. If he could get through the garden and by the outside steps into his office, the key of which he carries with him, he could there change his clothes quickly, get out his trunk, and when to all appearances he looked as though just come from a long journey, he could call in the steward.

All began well. Timar arrived without being seen, by the garden steps, at the door of his office.

But when he was going to open it with his private key, he made the disquieting discovery that another key was already in the lock. Some one was in the room! But his papers and ledgers were all there, and no one had any business inside. Who could the intruder be? He pulled the door open angrily and went in, and now it was his turn to be startled.

At his writing-table sat the last person he expected to find there. It was Timéa. Before her lay the great ledger, in which she was at work.

A storm of mingled feelings burst over Michael — alarm because the first person he met after his secret journey was his own wife, pleasure at finding her alone, and astonishment that this woman was at work here.

Timéa raised her eyes in surprise when she saw Michael enter; then hastening towards him, she offered him her hand in silence. This white face was still an unsolved enigma to her hus-

band. He could not read in it whether she knew all—whether she guessed something or not. What lay under this cold indifference? restrained contempt or concealed love? Or was the whole only the indolence of a lymphatic race? He had nothing to say to Timéa.

His wife seemed not to remark that his clothes were torn—women can see without looking. "I am glad you have come," said she gently. "I expected you any day. You will find your clothes in the next room; when you have dressed, will you please come back here? I shall have finished by that time." And then she put her pen in her mouth.

Michael kissed Timéa's hand. The pen between her teeth did not invite him to kiss her lips. He went into the adjoining room; there he found a basin of water, a clean shirt, and his clothes and house-shoes as at home. As Timéa could not know the day of his arrival, he must take for granted that she had made ready for him every day—and who knows for how long? But how comes this woman here, and what is she doing? He dressed quickly,

hiding his cast-off clothes in a corner of his wardrobe. Some one might ask him what caused these holes in the coat-sleeves, which are quite through at the elbows. And this linen suit with the coloured embroidery, would not a woman's eye decipher something from it? —women understand the mysteries of needle-work. He must hide the clothes. He and the soap had hard work to wash his hands clean. Would he not be asked what he had done to make them so black and horny?

When he was ready he went back to the office, where Timéa was waiting for him at the door, and putting her hand on his arm, said, "Let us go to breakfast."

From the office they passed through the dressing-room to get to the dining-room. Another surprise awaited Michael there; the round table was laid with three places — for whom were they intended? Timéa made a signal, and through one door came the servant, through the other Athalie. The third place was for her.

On Athalie's face an unconcealed anger shone when she saw Timar. "Ah, Herr von

Levetinczy, you have come home at last! It was a kind thought of yours to write to your wife, 'Take my keys and books, and be so good, dear wife, as to do all my work for me,' and then to leave us five months without news of your whereabouts."

"Athalie!" said Timéa, sternly.

Michael sat down in silence at his place, which he recognised by his own silver drinking-cup. He had been daily awaited here, and the table laid for him. Athalie said no more, but whenever she looked at Timar he could read her vexation in her eyes. This was a satisfactory sign.

When they rose from table Timéa asked her husband to go with her to the office. Michael began to think what he could invent when she should ask him about his journey. But she never referred to it even remotely. She placed two chairs at the desk, and laid her hand on the open day-book. "Here, sir, is the account of your business since the time when you gave over its direction to me."

"Have you carried it on yourself?"

"I understood that you desired me to do so. I found by your papers that you had undertaken a new and wholesale enterprise, the export of Hungarian flour. I saw that here not only your money, but also your credit and your mercantile honour, were at stake, and that on the good result of this affair hung the foundation of an important branch of trade. I did not understand this business, but I thought that it depended more on conscientious and faithful stewardship than on knowledge of affairs. I trusted this to no third person. Directly I received your letter I started for Levetinczy, and took, as you desired, the conduct of business into my own hands. I studied book-keeping and learnt to deal with figures. I think you will find everything in order—the books and the cash-balance." Timar looked with admiration at this woman, who knew how to apply the millions passing through her hands with such calm good sense, to their right object, to receive and expend moneys, and with a skilful hand to withdraw endangered funds; and who knew even more than that. "Fortune

has favoured us this year," continued Timéa, "and made up for my inexperience. The five months' income amounted to five hundred thousand gulden. This sum has not lain idle. Taking advantage of the powers entrusted to me, I have made investments."

What sort of investments are they likely to be which occur to a woman?

"Your first experiment with the export of flour succeeded entirely. Hungarian flour became at one stroke an article in request for the South American markets. So your agents write from Rio Janeiro, where all with one accord praise the ability and uprightness of your chief agent, Theodor Krisstyan." Timar thought to himself, even when I do evil good comes of it, and the greatest folly I commit turns into wisdom—when will this end? "After receiving this intelligence I began to consider what you would have done. One must seize an opportunity and occupy with all speed the newly opened markets. I hired immediately many mills, chartered more ships, had them laden, and at this moment a new cargo is on its way

to South America, which will defy competition."

Michael was astonished. In this woman there was more courage than in any man. Another woman would have locked up the money that it might not run away, and this one ventures to carry on her husband's enterprise, only in tenfold measure. "I thought you would have acted thus," said Timéa.

"Yes, indeed," muttered Timar.

"My expectations, moreover, were justified by the fact that, as soon as we threw ourselves more openly into this undertaking, a whole herd of competitors appeared, who are grinding away for dear life, and packing off their goods in barrels to America. But this need not cause you any anxiety—we shall beat them all. Not one of them knows the secret of the superiority of the Hungarian flour."

"How is that?"

"If one of them asked his wife, perhaps she would have known—that is how I discovered it. Amongst all the samples of American wheat, I can find none as heavy as ours. We must

therefore make flour of our heaviest kinds, so as to carry off the prize from the Americans. I selected our heaviest grain; our rivals here use lighter corn, and they will find their mistake, while we shall maintain our position."

Michael kissed Timéa's hand with the sacred awe with which we kiss our beloved dead, who no longer belong to us, but to the ground, and who cannot feel our caress. Whenever during his life of happy forgetfulness on the island he had thought of Timéa at all, it was as amusing herself, travelling, going to watering-places, having plenty of money, and wasting it as she chose. Now he saw in what her amusement had consisted—keeping books, sitting at a desk, conducting a correspondence, and learning foreign idioms without the help of a master—and all this because her husband had desired it.

His wife gave him a report of all branches of his extensive business. It was now all as familiar to her as if she had known it from childhood, and everything was in perfect order. Whilst Timar ran over the accounts, he acquired the conviction that if he himself had had to do

it all in those few months, he would have been hard at work all day. What labour this must have cost a young woman who had to learn everything by experience! Indeed she must have had but little time for sleep.

"But, Timéa, this is a tremendous task which you have accomplished in my stead!"

"It is true, and at first I found it very difficult, but by degrees I got used to it, and then it was easy enough. Work is wholesome."

What a sad reproach!—a young wife who finds consolation in work! Michael drew Timéa's hand to him. Deep sadness clouded his brow, his heart was heavy. If only he knew what Timéa was thinking.

The key of the desk was constantly in Timar's mind. If Timéa had discovered his secret, then her present conduct to her husband was only a fearful judgment held over him, to mark the difference between the accuser and the accused.

"Have you never been in Komorn since?" he asked Timéa.

"Only once, when I had to look in your desk for the contract with Scaramelli."

Timar felt his blood run cold. Timéa's face betrayed nothing.

"But now we will go back to Komorn," said Timar; "the flour is in full swing; we must wait for news of the fate of the cargoes now at sea, and they will not arrive before the winter. Or would you rather make a tour in Switzerland and Italy? This is the best season for it."

"No, Michael; we have been long enough apart, we will remain at home together."

But no pressure of the hand explains why she would like to remain at home with him. Michael had not the courage to say a tender word to her. Should he lie to her? He would have to live a lie in her presence from morning to evening. His silence even was a falsehood.

Looking through all the papers took the whole time until late dinner, and to this meal two guests were invited—the bailiff and the reverend Dean. The latter had begged to be at once informed of Herr von Levetinczy's return, that he might call upon him immediately. As soon as he received the news he hastened

to the castle, and of course put on his new decoration. The moment he entered he let off some oratorical fireworks in which he lauded Timar as the benefactor of the place. He compared him to Noah who built the Ark, to Joseph who saved his people from famine, and to Moses who made manna fall from heaven. The flour trade which he had set on foot was pronounced the greatest enterprise Europe had ever seen. Long live the Columbus of flour export!

Timar had to answer this address of welcome. He stammered and talked great nonsense. He had to control himself that he might not laugh aloud, and say to the worthy preacher, "Ha, ha! do not fancy that I had this idea in order to make your fortune; it was only to get a young rascal out of reach of a certain pretty girl, and if any good came of it, it is only by means of this woman here near me. Laugh then, good people!"

At table good-humour reigned. The Dean and the steward were neither of them despisers of the bottle. The wit and anecdotes of the

two old men made Timar laugh too; but whenever he cast a glance on Timéa's icy face, the laugh died on his lips. She had left her merriment elsewhere in pledge.

It was evening before they rose. The two old gentlemen reminded each other jocosely that it was quite time to leave, for the husband had returned to his young wife after a long absence, and they would have much to say to each other.

"Indeed you will do wisely to go soon," whispered Athalie to Timar. "Timéa has such dreadful headaches every evening, that she cannot sleep before midnight. See how pale she is!"

"Timéa, you are unwell?" asked Timar tenderly.

"There is nothing the matter with me," answered she.

"Don't believe her; ever since we came to Levetinczy she has suffered from headache. It is neuralgia, which she contracted by overtaxing her brain, and by the bad air here. I found a white hair in her head the other day. But she

conceals her suffering till she breaks down, and even then she never complains."

Timar experienced in spirit the tortures of a criminal stretched on the rack. And he had not the courage to say to his wife, "If you are suffering, let me sleep in your room and take care of you." No; he was afraid of uttering Noémi's name in his sleep, and that his wife might hear it, as she was kept awake by pain half the night. He must shun his marriage bed.

The next day they started for Komorn, and travelled by post, Michael sitting opposite the two ladies. It was a tedious journey: in the whole Banat the harvest was over; only the maize was still standing, otherwise they saw nothing but monotonous fields of stubble. None of them spoke; all three found it hard to keep awake. In the afternoon Timar could no longer endure the silent looks, the enigmatical expression of his wife; under pretence of wanting to smoke, he took a seat by the driver in the open *coupé*, and remained there. When they got out at a post-house, Athalie

grumbled at the bad roads, the dreadful heat, the annoying flies, the stifling dust, and all the rest of a traveller's trials. The inns are dirty, the food disgusting, the beds hard, the wine sour, the water impure, and the countenances of all the people frightful. She feels so ill all through the journey she is quite knocked up, she has fever, and her head will burst: what must Timéa be suffering, who is so nervous?

Timar had to listen to these lamentations all the way, but Timéa never uttered a complaint.

When they arrived at Komorn, Frau Sophie informed them that she had turned grey with loneliness. Grey indeed! She had been very happy—being able to go about all day from house to house and gossip to her heart's content. Timar felt a painful anxiety. Home is either a heaven or a hell. Now at last he would know what lay behind the marble coldness of this silent face.

As he entered the room with his wife she handed him the key of his desk. Michael knew she had opened it to get out the contract.

This writing-desk was an old and elaborate

piece of furniture, whose upper part was closed by a rolled falling cover, under which were drawers of various sizes. In the large drawer lay the contracts, in the small ones notes and valuables; the lock was a puzzle one, which you might vainly turn if you did not know its secret.

Timéa was in the secret, and could have access to all the drawers. With an uneasily beating heart Timar drew out the drawer where those jewels were kept which it had been unadvisable to place on the market. These gems have their own experts, who recognise by certain marks where this stone or that gem came from; and then follows the question, how did he get it? Only the third generation from the finder can venture to show it, as to him it is all one in what way his grandfather came into its possession.

If Timéa has been inquisitive enough to open that drawer she must have seen these gems. And if so, one amongst them, the diamond locket with the portrait which is so like her, must have been recognised by her. It is her

mother's picture, and then she must know all. She knows that Timar has received her father's treasures; it is hard to believe he came by them honestly. And by that dark, perhaps criminal road, they would lead to the fabulous riches which gained her hand for Timar, while he played the generous friend to her whom he had robbed. She may even think worse things of him than are true. Her father's mysterious death, his secret burial, might awake in her the suspicion that Timar had a hand in it.

These doubts were unbearable. Timar must set them at rest, and call yet one more falsehood to his aid. He took out the medallion and went with it to Timéa. "Dear Timéa," he said, sitting down beside his wife, "I have been living a long time in Turkey. What I did there you will learn later on. When I was in Scutari an Armenian jeweller offered me a diamond-framed picture, which is very like you. I bought it, and have brought you the ornament."

When Timéa saw the portrait her face changed in an instant. An emotion which could neither be assumed nor concealed was visible in her

sculptured features; she seized the picture with both hands and pressed it eagerly to her lips; her eyes filled with tears. This was true feeling; Timéa's face began to live.

Michael was saved. The girl, overpowered by her long-suppressed feelings, began to sob violently. Athalie heard and came in; she was surprised—she had never known Timéa to sob. But when she saw Athalie she ran towards her like a child, and cried, in a tone of mingled laughter and tears, "See, see! my mother! It is my mother's picture. . . . He has brought it to me!"

And then she hastened back to Michael, put both her arms round his neck, and whispered in a broken voice, "Thanks, oh, a thousand thanks!"

It seemed to Timar as if the time had come to kiss these grateful lips, and to kiss them on and on.

But alas! his heart said, "Thou shalt not steal." Now a kiss on these lips would be a theft, after all that had passed on the "ownerless island."

Another thought struck him. He went back

to his room, and fetched all the hidden jewels which remained in the drawer.

A wonderful woman this, who, though she had the key in her hands, left the secret drawers untouched and only took out the one paper she required! Then he packed all the ornaments into the bag he had over his shoulder when he came home, and went back to his wife. "I have not told you all," he said to Timéa. "Where I found the picture I discovered also these jewels, and bought them for you. Take them as a present from me."

And then he laid the dazzling gems one after another in Timéa's lap, until the sparkling heap quite covered her embroidered apron. It was like some magical gift from the thousand and one nights.

Athalie stood there pale with envy, with angrily clenched teeth. Perhaps these might all have been hers! But Timéa's face darkened and grew marble-like again. She looked with indifference at the heap of jewels in her lap. The fire of diamonds and rubies could not warm her.

BOOK FOURTH

NOÉMI

CHAPTER I.

A NEW GUEST.

WHAT rich bankers call business filled up the winter season, and Levetinczy began to enjoy his position. Riches bring pleasant dreams. He went often to Vienna and took part in the amusements of the commercial world, where many good examples were presented to him. A man who owns a million can allow himself the luxury, when he goes to the jeweller to buy New Year's gifts, of buying two of everything to please two hearts at once.

One for his wife, who sits at home and receives guests or looks after the household—the other for another lady, who either dances or sings, but in any case requires an elegant hotel, jewels, and laces. Timar was so for-

tunate as to be invited to the parties given at home by his friends, where the lady of the house makes tea—as well as to those differently organised *soirées*, where a very unceremonious set of ladies preferred champagne, and where Timar was constantly attacked by the question whether he had no little friend at the opera yet.

"The pattern of a faithful husband," declared his admirers.

"An unbearable prig," was the verdict of his critics.

But he says nothing, and thinks of—Noémi. What an eternity to have been separated from her—six months; to think of her every day, and not dare to confide his thoughts to a single soul!

He often caught himself on the point of betraying his thoughts; once as he sat at table the words all but escaped him, "Look! those are the same apples which grow on Noémi's island." "When Noémi had a headache, it went away if I laid my hand on her forehead." And if he looked at Timéa's pet white cat,

the exclamation hovered on his lips, "Narcissa, where did you leave your mistress, eh?"

He had every reason to be on his guard, for there was a being in the house who watched him as well as Timéa with Argus eyes.

Athalie could not but remark that since his return he was no longer so melancholy as before; every one noticed how well he looked; there must be some mystery in it. And Athalie could not bear any one in this house to be happy. Where did he steal his contentment? Why does he not suffer as he ought to do?

Business prospered. In the first month of the new year news came from the other side of the sea. The flour exported had arrived safely, and its success was complete. Hungarian flour had won such renown in South America, that now people tried to sell the native product under that name. The Austrian consul in Brazil hastened to inform his Government of this important result, by which the export trade was increased in a marked degree. The con-

sequence was, that Timar was made a Privy Councillor, and received the minor order of St Stephen, as an acknowledgment of the services rendered by him to his native land in the fields of commerce and philanthropy.

How the mocking demon in his breast laughed when they fastened the order on to his coat and called him "the Right Honourable"! "You have to thank two women for this—Noémi and Timéa." Be it so. The discovery of the purple dye had its origin in the eating of a purple snail by the little dog of a shepherd's mistress; but yet purple has become a royal colour.

Herr von Levetinczy now first began to rise in the estimation of the people of Komorn. When a man is a Privy Councillor, one cannot deny him a proper portion of respect. Every one hastened to congratulate him, and he received them all with a gracious condescension. Our Johann Fabula came too to wish him joy in the name of the fisher-folk. He was in the gala clothes of his class. On his short dolman of dark-blue cloth shone three rows of shell-

shaped silver buttons, as large as nuts, and from one shoulder to the other hung a broad silver chain with a large medallion for a clasp, on which the Komorn silversmith had stamped the head of Julius Cæsar. The other members of the deputation were equally splendid. Silver buttons and chains were at that time still worn by the mariners of Komorn. It was the custom to keep the visitors to dinner, and this honour fell to Fabula. He was a very frank person, who spoke with complete unreserve. When wine had loosened his tongue, he could not forbear to tell the gracious lady that when he first saw her as a girl he would never have thought that she would have become such a good housewife and be the wife of Herr von Levetinczy. Yes, indeed; he was afraid of her then, and now see how wonderful are the ways of God's providence, and how short-sighted are men; how everything has been ordered for the best: what happiness reigns in this house! If only a kind Providence would hear the prayers of those who entreat that a new blessing may be sent down from

heaven to the good lord of Levetinczy, in the shape of a little angel.

Timar covered his glass with his hand; a thought started through his mind—"Such a wish might have an unlooked-for result."

But Herr Fabula was not content with good wishes, he thought he must add some good advice. "But his Honour rushes about too much. In good truth I would not leave such a sweet pretty lady alone. But it can't be helped if the master must see to everything himself, for that's why it succeeds. Who would have thought of sending our flour across the sea? To tell the truth, when I heard it—excuse me for making so free—I thought to myself the master must have gone silly; before that flour gets there it will all be musty, while loaves grow out there on the trees and rolls on the bushes. And now just see what credit we have all got by it. But it is the master's eye that feeds the horse——"

This was to Michael an unwelcome irony, which he could not leave without contradiction. "My good Johann, if that was the secret of our

success you must bestow all your praises on my wife, for it was she who looked after everything."

"Yes, indeed; all honour to the merits of our noble lady!" said Fabula; "but, with his Honour's permission, I know what I know. I know where his Honour spent the whole summer."

Michael felt as if his hair stood on end with horror. Could this man know where he had been? It would be awful if he did.

Michael winked with one eye over his glass at his guest, but in vain.

"Well, shall I tell our gracious lady where the master spent the summer? Shall I let it out?"

Michael felt every limb paralysed by terror. Athalie kept her eyes fixed on his face; he durst not betray by a gesture that the gossip of the tipsy chatterer confused him. "Well, tell us then, Johann, where I was," he said, with enforced calmness.

"I will complain of you to the gracious lady; I will tell her," cried Fabula, putting down his

glass. "His Honour ran away without saying a word to any one. He went quietly on board a ship and sailed away to Brazil; he was over there in America and settled everything himself, and that's why it all went so smoothly."

Timar looked at the two women. On Timéa's face was reflected pure surprise, Athalie was vexed. She believed as fully in the truth of Fabula's tale as he did himself, and he would have staked his head on it.

Timar also smiled mysteriously at the story; now he was the one who lied, not Johann Fabula. The man of gold must go on lying.

. . . . . .

This story was very useful to Timar. He had now a sufficient excuse for his mysterious disappearances, and it was possible for him to give such an air of probability to the story of his Brazilian voyage that even Athalie believed it. Indeed she was the easiest to deceive. She knew what Timéa was feeling, and that she was glad to distract herself by absence and work from the thought of him on whose account her

heart ached. If a wife can do so, why not the husband? It was even simpler for him to fly from his sorrows to another hemisphere, and in the pursuit of wealth to forget what his heart coveted. How should Athalie have guessed that it was the husband who had already found a cure for his mortal sickness, and who was happy away from home? What would she have given to him who should have revealed the truth? But the rushes round the ownerless island did not chatter like the reeds to which King Midas's barber trusted his secret. Athalie was consumed with envy, whilst she vainly sought for a key to the riddle. At home and in public, Timar and Timéa presented the exemplary picture of a happy marriage. He heaped on his wife expensive jewels, and Timéa loaded herself with them when they went into society; she wished to shine by this means.

What could better prove the affection of the husband than the diamonds of the wife? Could Timar and Timéa really be a couple whose love consisted in giving and receiving diamonds, or

are there people in this world who can be happy without love?

Athalie still suspected Timéa and not Timar. But Timar could hardly wait till the winter was over and spring had come: of course, because then the mills can begin to grind again—what else could a man of business have in his mind?

This year Michael persuaded Timéa not to try her health by the management of business; he would give it over to his agents, and she should go during the summer to some sea-bathing place, to get rid of her neuralgia.

No one asked him where he was going. It was taken for granted that he would again travel to South America, and pretend he had been in Egypt or Italy.

But he hurried away to the lower Danube. When the poplars grew green, he could not stay at home; the alluring picture filled his dreams and took captive all his thoughts. He never stopped at Levetinczy, but only gave general instructions to his agent and his steward to do their best; then he went on to Golovacz, where he stayed a night with the

Dean; thence he had only a half-day's journey to get to Noémi. He had not seen her for six long months; his mind was filled with the picture of the meeting. Awake and asleep he was full of longing, and could hardly wait for dawn. Before sunrise he was up, put on his knapsack, threw his gun over his shoulder, and without waiting for the appearance of his host, he left the presbytery and hastened to the wooded river-bank.

The Danube does a good work in widening the limits of the wood every year by retreating from its banks, for in this way the watch-houses built twenty-five years ago on the shore have now taken up a position much farther inland. And he who wishes to cross the river without a passport, finds in the young brush-wood an entirely neutral territory.

Timar had sent a new boat to the hut, where he went on foot; he found it ready, and started as usual alone on the way to the reed-beds. The skiff floated like a fish on the water, and that it travelled so swiftly was not owing to itself alone. The year had grown to April,

it was spring, and the trees at Ostrova were already in blossom. So much the more astonished was he at the sight which met his eyes on the other side. The ownerless island did not look green; it seemed to have been burnt. As he approached he saw the reason; all the trees on the northern side were quite brown. The boat traversed the rushes quickly; when it touched the bank, Michael saw plainly that a whole long row of trees, Frau Therese's favourite walnuts, were dead — every one of them. Michael felt quite downcast at the sight. At this season he was generally greeted by green branches and rosebuds. Now a dead forest welcomed him—a bad omen.

He pressed forward and listened for the bark of greeting: not a sound to be heard. He walked on anxiously; the paths were neglected, covered by dry autumn leaves, and it seemed to him as if even the birds were silent. When he drew near the hut, a dreadful feeling overcame him — where were the inhabitants? They might be dead and not buried; he had been busied about other things for

half a year—with affairs of state, with showing off his young wife, and making money. And meanwhile Heaven had watched over the islanders—if It chose.

As he entered the verandah, a door opened and Therese came out. She looked serious, as if something had frightened her; and then a bitter smile appeared on her face. "Ah! you have come!" said she, and came to press his hand. And then it was she who asked him why he came looking so grave. "No misfortune has happened?" Timar asked hastily.

"Misfortune? No," said Therese, with a melancholy smile.

"My heart was sore when I saw the dead trees," said Michael, to excuse his serious looks.

"The flood last summer did that," answered Therese; "walnut-trees cannot stand wet."

"And how are you both?" asked Timar uneasily.

Therese answered gently, "We are pretty well, I and the other two."

"What do you mean? the other two?"

She smiled and sighed, and smiled again;

then she laid her hand on Michael's shoulder and said, "The wife of a poor smuggler fell ill here: the woman died, the child remained here. Now you know who the other two are."

Timar rushed into the house: at the far end of the room stood a cradle woven of osiers, and near it on one side was Almira, on the other Noémi. Noémi rocked the cradle and waited till Timar came to her. In it lay a little baby, with chubby cheeks, which pressed the cherry lips into a soft pout; its eyes were only half shut, and the tiny fists lay over its face. Michael stood spellbound before the cradle. He looked at Noémi as if to seek the answer to the riddle in her face, on which a sweet ray of heavenly light seemed to shine, in which modesty and love were combined. She smiled and cast her eyes down. Michael thought he would lose his senses.

Therese laid her hand on his arm, "Then are you angry that we have adopted the orphan child of the poor smuggler's wife? God sent it to us."

Angry? He had fallen on his knees, and

held the cradle in his embrace, pressing it and its inhabitant to his breast; then he began to sob violently, like one who has kept a whole ocean of sorrow in his heart, which suddenly overflows its bounds.

Timar kissed the little messenger from God wherever he could—its little hands and feet, the hem of its robe, its rosy cheeks. The baby made grimaces under the kisses, but did not wake. At last it opened its eyes, its great blue eyes, and looked at the strange man with astonishment, as if to say, "Does this man want anything of me?" and then it laughed as if it thought, "I don't care what he wants," and after that it shut its eyes and slumbered on, still smiling and undisturbed by the flood of kisses.

Therese said, smiling, "You poor orphan, you never dreamt of this, did you?" and turned away to hide her tears.

"And am I to have no greeting?" said Noémi, with charming anger. Michael turned to her, still on his knees. He spoke not a word, only pressed her hand to his lips and hid his

face silently in her lap. He was dumb as long as the child slept. When the little creature awoke, it began to talk in its own language—which we call crying. It is lucky there are those who understand it. The baby was hungry.

Noémi said to Michael that he must now leave the room, for he was not to know what the poor little orphan was fed upon.

Michael went outside; he was in a transport. It seemed as if he was on a new star, from which one could look down on the earth as on a foreign body. All he had called his own on the terrestrial ball was left behind, and he no longer felt its attraction drawing him thither. The circle in which he had spent his former life was trodden under foot, and he had attained a new centre of gravity. A new object, a new life, stood before him; only one uncertainty remained—how could he contrive to vanish from the world? To pass into another sphere without leaving this mortal life behind; to live on two different planets at once, to mount from earth to heaven, to pass again from heaven to earth, there to entertain angels, and here to live

for money—alas! this was no task for human nerves. He would lose his reason in the attempt.

Not without reason are little children called angels, or "messengers": children are, indeed, messengers from the other world, whose mysterious influence is visible in their eyes, to those who receive them as gifts of God. A wonderful look often meets us in the eye of an infant, which is lost when the lips learn speech. How often Michael gazed for hours at this blue ray from heaven in the baby's eyes, when it lay on a lambskin out on the grass, and he stretched himself beside it, and plucked the flowers it wanted—"There then, here it is." He had his work cut out to get it away, for the little thing put everything in its mouth. He studied its first attempts at language, he let it drag at his beard, and sang lullabies to put it to sleep.

His feeling for Noémi was quite different now; it was not desire, but bliss—the glow of passion had given place to a sweet contented calm, and he felt like one convalescent from a fever. Noémi, too, had altered since they last

met; on her face lay an expression of submissive tenderness, and in all her conduct was a consistent gentleness, which could not have been assumed—a quiet dignity combined with chaste reserve, which surrounds a woman with a halo, compelling respect. Timar could not get used to his happiness: he required many days to be convinced that it was not a dream —that this little hut, half wood, half clay, and the smiling woman with the babbling babe at her breast, were reality and not a vision.

And then he thought, what will become of them?

He strode about the island and brooded on the future.

"What can I give this child? Much money? They know nought of money here. Great estates? This island suffices. Shall I take him with me and make him into a great and wealthy man? But the women could not part with him. Shall I take them too? But even if they consented, I could not do it; they would learn what I am, and would despise me. They can only be happy here: only here can this

child hold up its head, where none can ask its name."

The women had called it Adeodatus (Gift of God). It had no other name. What other could it have?

One day when he was wandering aimlessly, deep in thought, about the island, striding through the bushes and weeds, Timar came suddenly to a part where the dry twigs crackled under his feet. He looked round; he was in the melancholy little plantation of dead walnut-trees. The beautiful trees were all dried up: spring had not clothed them with fresh green foliage, and the dead leaves covered the ground.

An idea struck Michael in this vegetable cemetery. He hastened back to the hut. "Therese, have you still the tools you used in building your house?"

"There they are on the shelf."

"Give them here. I have an idea; I will fell the dead walnuts and build of them a little house for Dodi."

Therese clasped her hands in astonishment.

But Noémi's answer was to kiss her little Dodi and say to him, "Dost thou hear?"

Michael interpreted the wonder on Therese's face as incredulity. "Yes, yes," he persisted, "I will build the house myself without any help—a little house like a jewel-case, like those the Wallachians build, lined with beautiful oak; mine shall be of walnut, and fit for a prince. I will drive every nail myself, and it shall be Dodi's house when he gets bigger."

Therese only smiled. "That will be fine, Michael. I too built my nest as the swallows do; I formed the walls of clay, and thatched my roof with rushes. But carpentry is not one man's work; the old saw has two handles, and one cannot manage it alone."

"But are we not two?" cried Noémi, eagerly. "Can't I help him? Do you fancy my arm is not strong enough?" and she turned her sleeve up to her shoulder to show off her arm. It was beautifully formed, yet muscular, fit for Diana. Michael covered it with kisses from the shoulder down to the finger-tips, and then said, "Be it so."

"Oh, we will work together," cried Noémi, whose lively fancy had seized on Michael's suggestion with lightning speed. "We will both go out into the wood; we will make a hammock for Dodi and sling it from the branches. Mother shall bring us out our meals, and we will sit on the planks we have sawn, and take our dinner out of the same plate: how good it will taste."

And so it did. Michael took the axe and went out to the walnut-grove, where he set to work. Before he had felled and topped one tree his hands were blistered. Noémi told him women's hands never got sore. When three trees were cut down, so that one trunk could be laid across the other two, Michael wanted Noémi's help. She was quite in earnest, and attacked the task bravely. In her slender form lay stores of strength and endurance. She handled the great saw as cleverly as if she had been taught to do it.

Michael gradually got used to the dressing of the walnut planks; the axe, too, did good service, and Noémi admired him greatly. "Tell

me, Michael," she asked him one day, "have you never been a carpenter?"

"Oh yes," he answered, "a ship's carpenter."

"And tell me, how did you become such a rich man that you can stay away a whole summer from your work, and spend your time elsewhere. You are your own master, I suppose? You take orders from no one?"

"I must tell you all about it some day," said Michael; and yet he never told her how he became rich, so as to be able to spend weeks on the island sawing wood. He often related to Noémi stories of his adventurous journeys through all lands, but in his romantic tales he never said anything about himself. He escaped inquisitive pressure by working hard all day; and when he lay down at night, it was not the time to tease him with questions, though many wives take advantage of the opportunity.

During the long time Timar spent in the ownerless island, he had gradually become convinced that it was by no means so concealed as

to be unknown: its existence was known to a large class of visitors. But they never revealed it to the outer world. Smuggling, on the banks of this wooded river, was a regular profession, with its own constitution, its own schools, its secret laws, forming a state within a state. It often surprised Timar to find amongst the willow-copses of the island a canoe or a boat, watched by no one. If he came back a few hours later, it was no longer there. Another time he stumbled on great bales of goods, which also had disappeared when he returned. All the mysterious people who used the island as a resting-place seemed purposely to avoid the neighbourhood of the hut: they went and came without leaving a footmark on the turf. There were cases, however, in which they visited the hut; and then it was always Therese who received their visit. When Almira gave the signal that strangers were coming, Timar left his work and retired into the inner room; he must not be seen by any stranger. It is true the beard he had grown had altered him considerably, but yet some one might come who

had seen him elsewhere. The wild people always came to Therese if they had been hurt; they often frequented places where they were likely to be wounded. Sometimes they had deep, dangerous gunshot wounds, which they could not show to the regimental surgeon, for the result would be a court-martial; but the island lady knew of healing salves, could reduce fractures, bind up wounds, and prescribe medicines for fever. She was sought by sick people who kept secret their abode, for they knew the physicians would never endure this quack doctoring. She reconciled enemies who dared not go to law, and consoled criminals who repented of their sins, with the hope of God's mercy. Often some fugitive, tired and exhausted with hunger and thirst, came to her threshold. She asked not, "Whence do you come or whither do you go?" She took him in, and let him go when restored and refreshed, after filling his pouch with food.

Many know her whose religion is silence, and there is no bond which binds master and disciple so closely as this. Every one knows that

no money is to be found here; even avarice has no reason to wish her ill.

Timar could be certain of having found a place over which centuries might pass before the history of its inhabitants should be drawn into that chaos we call the world. He could go on with his carpentry without fearing that the news would leak out that Michael Timar Levetinczy, Privy Councillor, landowner, banker, had turned into a woodcutter in an unknown island; and that, when he rested from his hard labour, he cut willow-branches to shelter a poor orphan child which had neither parents nor a name of its own. What joys he knew here! how he listened for the first word the child could speak! The little man had such trouble to shape his unskilful lips to the words. "Papa," of course, was the first; what else could it be? The child learns also to understand the sorrowful side of life; when a new tooth comes, what pain and sleepless nights must be endured! Noémi remains at home with it, and Michael runs back from his work to see how little Dodi is. He takes the child from Noémi and carries

him about, singing lullabies to him. If he succeeds in putting Dodi to sleep and soothing his pain, how triumphant he is! He sings—

"For all the gold the world could hold,
I would not give my Dodi's curl."

One day Michael suddenly found that he had grubbed-up and cut down all the timber. So far the work had prospered; but now he found he could not get on. House-carpentry is a trade like any other, and must be learnt, and he had not spoken the truth when he said he understood it.

Autumn drew near. Therese and Noémi were already used to think it quite natural for Timar to leave them at this season; he must of course earn his bread. His business is of a sort which gets on by itself in the summer, but in winter he must give himself up to it. They knew that from other tradespeople. But in another house the same idea reigned. Timéa believed Michael had business which obliged him to spend the summer away from home: at that season the management of his estates, of

his building and export contracts, demanded all his attention.

From autumn to spring he deceived Timéa, from spring to autumn he deceived Noémi. He could not be called inconsistent.

This time he left the island earlier than in other years. He hastened back to Komorn, where all his affairs had progressed in his absence beyond his expectations. Even in the Government lottery the first prize must needs fall to him ; the long-forgotten ticket lay buried somewhere in a drawer under other papers, and not till three months after the drawing did he bring it out, and claim the unhoped-for hundred thousand gulden, like one who hardly cares for such a trifle. The world admired him all the more. He had so much money, people said, that he wished for no more.

What could he do with it ?

He began by sending for celebrated cabinet-makers from Szekler and Zarand, who understand the building of those splendid wooden houses which last for centuries, real palaces of hard wood. The Roumanian nobility live in

such houses as these, which are full of beautiful carving inside. The house and its furniture, tables, chairs, and wardrobes, are all the work of one hand. Everything in it is of wood—not a single bit of iron is used.

CHAPTER II.

THE WOOD-CARVER.

On his return home, Michael found Timéa somewhat unwell. This induced him to call in two celebrated doctors from Vienna in order to consult them about his wife's health. They agreed that a change of climate was necessary, and advised a winter sojourn in Meran; so Michael accompanied thither his wife and Athalie. In the sheltered valley, he chose for Timéa a villa in whose garden stood a pavilion built like a Swiss *châlet*. He knew that Timéa would like it. In the course of the winter he often visited her, generally in the company of an elderly man, and found that, as he expected, the *châlet* was her favourite resort.

When he returned to Komorn he set to work

to build just such another *châlet* as the one at Meran. The cabinetmaker he had brought with him was a master of his art. He copied the *châlet* and its furniture in the minutest detail; then he installed a large workshop in Timar's one-storeyed house in the Servian street, and there set to work. No one was to know anything about it—it was to be a surprise. But the architect required an apprentice to help him, and it was difficult to find one who could hold his tongue. There was nothing for it but to turn Timar himself into an apprentice, and he now vied with his master from morning to night with chisel and gimlet, in carving, planing, polishing, and turning. But as to the cabinetmaker himself, if you had closed his mouth with Solomon's seal, you could not have made him discreet enough to refrain from letting out the secret to his Sunday evening boon-companions, of the surprise Herr von Levetinczy was preparing for his wife. First they made the different parts and fitted them together: then the whole, as fast as it was ready, was set up in the beautiful park on the

Monostor. He himself, a regular Crœsus, does not shrink from working all day like a labourer, and is as good at the tools as if he were a foreman. He does not trouble about his own affairs, he leaves them to his agents, and saws and carves the whole day long in the workshop. But they must not let it go further, for the gracious lady was to have a surprise when she came home. Naturally the whole town heard of it, and so did Frau Sophie, who wrote to Athalie, who told Timéa, so that Timéa knew beforehand that Michael, when she came home in the spring, would drive with her some fine day to the Monostor hill, where they had a large orchard: there, on the side overlooking the Danube, she would find her dear Meran pavilion exactly copied, her work-basket at the window, her favourite books on the birchwood shelves, her cane chair on the verandah. All this to surprise her; and she must smile as if much pleased, and when she praised the maker, she would hear from him, "You must not compliment me, gracious lady, but my apprentice." "Who executed the best carvings, who made

the footstool, these elegant balustrades, these columns and capitals?" "My apprentice." "And who was he?" "The noble lord of Levetinczy himself. All this is his work, gracious lady."

And then Timéa would smile and try to find words to express her thanks. Only words! for he may heap treasures on his wife, or give her black bread that he had earned by his labour; he cannot purchase her affection.

And so it was. In the spring Timéa came back. The Monostor surprise was skilfully planned, with a splendid banquet and a troop of guests. On Timéa's face hovered a melancholy smile; on Timar's, reserved kindness; and on those of the guests, envious congratulation. The ladies said no woman was worthy of such a husband as Timar, he was an ideal husband; but the men said it was not a good sign when a husband tried to win his wife's favour by presents and attentions.

Only Athalie said nothing: she sought a clue to the mystery and found none. What had come to Timar? His countenance betrayed

something like happiness; what was he concealing under his care for Timéa? In company he was bright and cheerful, unconstrained and at ease with Athalie, sometimes even taking her for a turn in the cotillon. Was he really happy, or was he indifferent? It was vain for him to try and win Timéa's heart; Athalie knew that by her own experience. She had found plenty of wooers, but refused them all,—all men were alike to her; she had only loved one, whom now she hated. She alone understood Timéa.

But Michael she could not fathom. He was a man of pure gold, without a speck of rust upon him.

When spring came, Timar again called in the physicians to pronounce on Timéa's health. This time she was advised to try the sea-bathing at Biarritz. Michael took her there, arranged her apartments, took care that she should be able to compete in dress and equipages with English peeresses and Russian princesses, and left a heavy purse with her, begging her to bring it back empty. He was generous to Athalie, put her down as Timéa's cousin in

the visitors' list, and she too was to change her dress five times a-day like Timea. Could any one better fulfil the duties of the head of a family?

Then he hurried away, not homewards, but to Vienna; there he bought the whole furniture of a workshop, and had it sent in chests to Pancsova.

Here he had to invent some pretence to get the boxes over to the island. Caution was most necessary. The fishermen, who often saw him go round the Ostrova island in a boat, and not return for months, had puzzled their heads as to who he was and what brought him here. When the cases arrived, he had them conveyed to the poplar-groves of the left bank of the Danube and there unloaded. Then he called in the fishermen, and said they must get them over to the lonely island—they contained arms.

That one word was enough to sink the secret to the bottom of the sea. Henceforward he could go backwards and forwards by day or night, no one would ever mention his name. They all knew now that he was an agent of the

Servian and Montenegrin heroes of the insurrection, and the rack would not have extorted information from them. He became a sacred personage in their eyes. In this way, in order to hide himself in darkness, he deceived every one with whom he exchanged a word. The fishermen ferried over the cases at night, and Timar with them; they looked out for a place on the shore where the thickest bushes grew, and carried the boxes there, and when Michael would have paid them, they would not accept a groschen from him, only grasping his hand.

He remained on the island, and the fishermen left him. It was a splendid moonlight night; the nightingale sang on its nest. Michael went along the bank till he came to the path, and passed the place where he had left off his work last year; the trunks were carefully covered with rushes to keep the wet off.

He approached the little dwelling on tiptoe. It was a good sign that he heard no noise. Almira does not bark, because she is sleeping in the kitchen so as not to wake the child. All is well in the house.

How should he announce himself, and surprise Noémi? He stood before the little window, half covered by climbing roses, and began to sing—

"For all the gold the world could hold,
I would not give my Dodi's curl."

He was not disappointed; a moment later the window opened, and Noémi looked out with a face radiant with joy. "My Michael," whispered the poor child.

"Yes, thy Michael," he murmured, clasping the dear head in both arms. "And Dodi?"

"He is asleep; hush, we must not wake him." And still the lips murmured tenderly, "Come in."

"He might wake and cry."

"Oh, he is no longer a crying child. Just think, he is a year old."

"What! a year already? He is quite a big fellow."

"He can say your name already."

"Does he really talk?"

"And he is learning to walk."

"Just fancy!"

"He eats anything now."

"Impossible; that is too soon."

"What do you know about it? wait till you see him."

"Push the curtain aside that I may see him by the moonlight."

"No; that would not do. If the moon shines on a sleeping child it makes it ill."

"Nonsense!"

"There are all sorts of wonderful things about children, and one must have plenty of faith; that is why women have charge of children, because they believe everything. Come in and look at him."

"I will not go in as long as he is asleep—I might wake him; you come out."

"I cannot do that; he would wake if I left him, and mother is asleep."

"Well, then, you go back to him, and I will remain outside."

"Won't you lie down?"

"It is almost daybreak. Go back to him, and leave the window open."

And he remained standing by the window,

looking into the little room, on whose floor the moon painted silver patterns, and trying to distinguish the tones which came from the quiet chamber—a little whimper of an awakened child, then a low song like a dreamy lullaby, "For all the gold . . ." Then the sound of a kiss, which a good baby gets as a reward for going to sleep. With his elbows on the window-sill, and listening to the breaths of the sleepers, Timar awaited the dawn, which filled the little house with light. The red sunrise awoke the child, and there was no more sleep for the others. The baby crowed and babbled; what it said only those two understood—itself and Noémi.

When at last Michael got it into his arms, he said, "I shall stay here, Dodi, till I have finished your house."

The child said something which Noémi interpreted to mean, "That is just what I wish."

These were the happiest days of Timar's dual life. Nothing troubled the serenity of his happiness, except the thought of that other life to which he must return. If he could find ways and means to sever himself from that, he might

live on here in peace. Nothing would be easier; he simply had to stay here. He would be sought for during the first year, for two or three more he would be remembered from time to time; then the world would forget him and he it, and Noémi would remain to him. And what a jewel she was! Whatever was lovable in woman was combined in her, and every feminine defect was wanting. Her beauty was not of the kind which satiates by its monotony: with every change of expression arose a new charm. Tenderness, gentleness, and fire were united in her disposition. The virgin, the fairy, the woman were harmoniously blended in her. Her love was never selfish; her whole being went out to him whom she loved: his sorrows and joys were hers, she knew no others. At home she thought of every trivial detail which could conduce to his comfort; she helped him in his work with an untiring hand. Ever bright and fresh, if she felt unwell a kiss from him drove away the pain. She was submissive to him, who worshipped her. And when she took the child on her lap, it was a sight to drive

the man mad who had made her his own,—and yet not really his.

But Timar had not yet made up his mind. He still played with Fate. The price was too high even for such a treasure as a lovely woman with a smiling child in her arms.

The cost was — a whole world! a property amounting to millions; his position in society; his rank and noble friends; the enterprise of world-wide influence, on whose result hung the future of a great national branch of trade! and besides — Timéa. He might have reconciled himself to the idea of treading his riches under foot: they came from the submarine depths, and might return thither.

But his vanity refused to contemplate the notion that that woman with the white face, which no glow from her husband could animate, might be happy in this life—with another man. Perhaps he hardly knew himself what a fiend was hidden in his breast. The woman who could not love him was fading away before his eyes, while he could live through happy days where he was well beloved. And during this

time the house-building made rapid progress, and was already being put together by the workman's skilful hand; the roof was on, and covered with wide planks formed like fish-scales to overlap each other. The carpentry was done, and now came the cabinet-work. Michael completed it without any assistance, and might be seen from morn to eve in the workshop he had arranged in the new house, where he sang all day as he planed and sawed. Like the steadiest of day-labourers, he never left off his work before dark; then he returned to the hut, where an appetising supper awaited him. After the meal he sat down on the bench outside the house, and lighted his clay pipe. Noémi sat by him and took Dodi on her knees, who was now expected to exhibit what he had learnt during the day. A new word! And is not this one word a greater acquirement than all the wisdom of the world? "What would you sell Dodi for?" Noémi asked him once in jest. "For the whole earth full of diamonds?"

"Not for the whole heaven full of angels."

Little Dodi happened that day to be full of

spirits. In a mischievous mood he caught hold with his little hand of the pipe Michael had in his mouth, and pulled till he got it out of his hold, when he at once threw it on the ground; as it was made of clay, of course it was broken into atoms. Timar was rather hasty in his exercise of justice, and bestowed a little tap on the child's hand as a punishment for the damage done. The boy looked at him, then hid his head in his mother's breast, and began to cry.

"See now," said Noémi, sadly, "you would give him away for a pipe, and this one was only of clay."

Michael was very sorry to have slapped Dodi's hand. He tried to make it up by coaxing words, and kissed the little hand, but the child was shy of him, and crept under Noémi's shawl. All night he was restless, wakeful, and crying. Timar got angry, and said the child was of a wilful nature, his obstinacy must be overcome. Noémi cast a gently reproachful glance on him.

The next day Timar left his bed earlier than usual, and went to his work, but he was never heard to sing all day. He left off early in the

afternoon, and when he came home he could see by Noémi's face that she was quite alarmed at his appearance. His complexion was quite altered. "I am not well," he said to Noémi; "my head is so heavy, my feet will hardly carry me, and I have pain in all my limbs. I must lie down."

Noémi hastened to make up a bed for him in the inner room, and helped him to undress. With anxiety she noticed that Michael's hands were cold and his breath burning. Frau Therese felt his forehead, and advised him to cover himself well, for he was going to have ague. But Michael had the sensation that something worse was at hand. In this district typhus was raging, for the spring floods had swelled the Danube in an unusual degree, and left malaria behind them. When he laid his head on the pillow he was still sensible enough to think of what would happen if a serious illness attacked him; no doctor was near to help. He might die here, and no one would know what had become of him. What would become of Timéa, and above all, of Noémi? Who would care for the

forsaken one, a widow without being a wife? Who would bring up Dodi, and what fate awaited him when he should be grown up, and Michael underground? Two women's lives would be wrecked by his death!

And then he began to think of the revelations of his delirium before the two women who would be with him day and night—of his stewards, his palaces, and of his pale wife—of how he would see Timéa before him, call her by name, and speak of her as his wife,—and Noémi knows that name.

Besides his bodily pain, another thing tormented him—that he had struck Dodi yesterday. This trifle lay heavy as a crime on his soul. After he was in bed he wanted the child brought to him that he might kiss it, and whispered "Noémi," with hot breath.

"What is it?" she answered.

But already he knew not what he had asked. Directly he was in bed the fever broke out with full force. He was a strong man, and such are the first to succumb to this "aide-de-camp" of death, and suffer the most from it. Thence-

forward he wandered continually; and Noémi heard every word he spoke. The sick man knew no one, not even himself. He who spoke through his lips was a stranger—a man who had no secrets, and told all he knew. The visions are akin to the delusions of madness; they turn on one fixed idea, and however the detail may change, the central figure returns ever and again to the surface.

In Timar's wandering there was one of these dominating figures—a woman. Not Timéa, but Noémi—of her he continually spoke. Timéa's name never passed his lips—she did not fill his soul.

For Noémi it was horror and rapture combined to listen to this unconscious babble,—horror, because it spoke of such strange things, and took her with him to such unknown regions, that she trembled at a fever which compelled him to look on at such marvels—and yet it was bliss to hear him, for he always talked of her, and her only.

Once he was in a princely palace and talking with some great man. "To whom should his

Excellency give this decoration? I know a girl on the ownerless island—no one is more worthy of it than she. Give her the Order. She is called Noémi; her other name? Do queens have another name? The first. Noémi the first, by the grace of God queen of the ownerless island and the rose-forest."

He carried his idea further. "If I become king of the ownerless island, I shall form a ministry. Almira will be inspector of meat, and Narcissa will be appointed to the dairy department. I shall demand security from them, and name them as confidential advisers." Then he talked of his palaces. "How do you like these saloons, Noémi? Does the gilding of this ceiling please you? Those children dancing on the golden background are like Dodi—are they not like him? A pity they are so high up. Are you cold in these great halls? So am I—come, let us go away. It is better by the fire in our little hut. I do not love these high palaces; and this town is often visited by earthquakes —I fear the vault may fall in on us. There! behind that little door some one is spying on

us—an envious woman. Do not look, Noémi! Her malicious glance might do you harm. This house once belonged to her, and now she wanders through it like a ghost. See, she has a dagger in her hand, and wants to murder you; let us run away!"

But there was a hindrance in the way of escape—the frightful mass of gold. "I cannot stand up, the gold drags me down. It is all on my breast; take it away! Oh, I am drowning in gold! The roof has fallen in, and gold is rolling down on me. I am suffocating. Noémi, give me your hand; pull me from under this horrible mountain of gold."

His hand lay in Noémi's all the time, and she thought trembling what a fearful power it was which tortured a poor sailor with such dreams of money. Then he began again: "You don't care for diamonds, Noémi? You little fool! Do you think their fire burns? Don't be afraid. Ha! you are right, it does burn—I did not know that—it is hell-fire. Even the names are alike—Diamond, Demon. We will throw them into the water—throw them from you. I

know where they came from, and I will throw them back into the water. Don't be afraid, I will not remain long under water. Hold your breath and pray. As long as you can stay without taking breath I shall be down below; I am only going to dive into the cabin of the sunken ship. Ah! who is lying on this bed?"

Such a shudder seized him that he sprang from his couch and would have rushed away. Noémi was hardly able to get him back to bed. "Some one is lying there, but I must not say the name. See how the red moon shines in at the window. Shut the light out. I will not have it on my face. How near it is coming! Draw the curtain across!"

But the curtains were drawn, and besides, it was pitch-dark outside. When the fever-fit passed, he murmured, "Oh, how lovely you are without diamonds, Noémi!"

Then a new fantasy seized him. "That man stands at our antipodes on the other side of the earth. If the earth were of glass he could look down upon us. But he can see me just as well as I see him. What is he doing? He is

catching rattlesnakes, and when he comes back he will let them loose on the island. Don't let him land; don't let him come back! Almira! Almira! At him; tear him! Aha! now a giant snake has got him; it is strangling him. How frightful his face is! If only I need not see the snake swallow him! Will he look at me? Now there is only his head out, and he keeps looking at me. Oh, Noemi, cover my face that I may not see him!"

Again the dream-scene changes. "A whole fleet floats on the sea. What are the ships laden with? With flour. Now comes a whirlwind, a tornado seizes the ships, carries them into the clouds and tears them into splinters. The flour is all spilt: the whole world is white with it, white is the sea, white the heavens, and white the air. The moon peeps from the clouds, and only look how the wind covers its face with flour. It looks like some red-nosed old toper who has powdered his face. Laugh then, Noémi!" But she wrung her hands and shuddered. The poor creature was by his bed day and night. By day she sat on a chair at his

side; by night she pulled her bed close to his and slept beside him: careless of the infection, she laid her head on Michael's pillow, pressed his perspiring brow to her cheek, and kissed away the burning fever-breaths from his parched lips.

Frau Therese tried by harmless remedies to reduce the fever, and took out the glass casements that the fresh air—the best medicine in fever cases—might freely penetrate the little room. She said to Noémi, that by her calculation the crisis would set in on the thirteenth day, when the illness would either take a turn for the better or terminate fatally.

How long Noémi knelt during these days by the sick man's bed and prayed to God, who had tried her so heavily, to have mercy on her poor heart! If only He would give Michael back to life—and then if the grave must have a sacrifice, there was she ready to die in his stead.

Providence delights in what one might call the irony of fate—Noémi offered to cruel death the whole world and her own self, in exchange for Michael's life. She fancied she had to do with a good fellow who might be bargained

with. The destroying angel accepted her challenge.

On the thirteenth day the fever and delirium ceased: the previous nervous excitement gave place to intense exhaustion, which is a symptom of improvement, and permits a hope that with the greatest care the patient may be given back to life, if his mind is kept calm and he is preserved from anxiety or emotion: sick people are so easily excited at this stage of convalescence. His recovery hung on perfect tranquillity; any violent excitement would kill him. Noémi stayed all night by Timar's sick-bed: she never even went out once to see little Dodi; he slept in the outer room with Frau Therese. On the morning of the fourteenth day, while Michael lay sound asleep, Therese whispered in Noémi's ear, "Little Dodi is very ill." The child now! Poor Noémi! Her little Dodi had the croup, the most dangerous of all childish maladies, against which all the skill of the physician is often powerless.

Mortally terrified, Noémi rushed to her child. The face of the innocent creature was quite

changed. It was not crying—this disease has no characteristic cry, but so much the more dreadful is the suffering. How terrible, a child who cannot complain, whom men cannot help! Noémi looked blankly at her mother as if to ask, "And have you no cure for this?" Therese could hardly bear this look. "So many miserable sick and dying people have been helped by you, and for this one you know of no remedy?"

"None!" Noémi knelt down beside the child's little bed, pressed her lips on his, and murmured softly, "What is it, my darling, my little one, my angel? Look at me with thy pretty eyes."

But the little one would not lift up the pretty eyes, and when at last, after many kisses and entreaties, it opened the heavy lids, its expression was terrible—the look of a child which has already learnt to fear death. "Oh, don't look so! not so!" The child never cried, but only gave utterance to a hoarse cough.

If only the other invalid in there does not hear it! Noémi held her child trembling in

her arms, and listened to hear if the sleeper close by was yet awake. When she heard his voice she left the child and went to Michael. He was suffering from great exhaustion, irritable and peevish.

"Where had you gone?" he questioned Noémi. "The window is open; a rat might get in while I was asleep. Don't you see a rat about?" It is a constant delusion of typhus patients to see rats everywhere.

"They can't get in, my darling; there is a grating over the window."

"Ah! and where is the cold water?" Noémi gave him some to drink. But he was very angry with it. "That is not fresh cold water, it is quite warm. Do you want me to die of thirst?"

Noémi bore his crossness patiently. And when Michael fell asleep again, she ran out to Dodi. The two women replaced each other, so that as long as Michael slept, Therese sat by him, and when he awoke, she gave Noémi a sign to leave her sick child and take her place by Michael's bed. And this went on through

the long night. Noémi passed constantly from one sick bed to the other, and she had to keep excuses always ready for her husband if he should ask where she had been.

The child grew worse. Therese could do nothing, and Noémi dared not weep for fear of Michael seeing her tearful eyes and asking the reason. The next morning Timar felt easier, and wished for some soup. Noémi hastened out to fetch it, as it was kept ready. The invalid swallowed it, and said he felt the better for it. Noémi seemed delighted at the good news.

"Well, and what is Dodi doing?" asked Michael.

Noémi trembled lest he should see the throbs of her heart at the question.

"He is asleep," she replied gently.

"Asleep? But why asleep now? He is not ill?"

"Oh no, he is all right."

"And why do you not bring him to me when he is awake?"

"Because then you are asleep."

"That is true; but when we are both awake together, you must bring him in and let me see him."

"I will do so, Michael."

The child sank gradually. Noemi had to conceal from Timar that Dodi was ill, and constantly to invent stories about him, for his father constantly asked for him. "Does Dodi play with his little man?"

"Oh yes, he is always playing with him" (. . . with that fearful skeleton!).

"Does he talk of me?"

"He loves to talk of you" (. . . he will do so soon when he is with the good God).

"Take him this kiss from me;" and Noémi bore to her child the parting kiss of his father.

Another day dawned. The awakening invalid found himself alone in the room. Noémi had watched all night by her child: she had looked on his death-struggle, and pressed her tears back into her heart; why had it not burst? When she went in to Michael she smiled again.

"Were you with Dodi?" asked the sick man.

"Yes, I have been with him."

"Is he asleep now?"

"Yes, he is asleep."

"Not really?"

"Truly, he sleeps well."

Noémi has just closed his eyes—for his last sleep. And she dared not betray her agony. She must show a smiling face. In the afternoon Michael was much excited again: as the day drew on, his nervous irritation increased. He called to Noémi, who was in the next room; she hastened in and looked lovingly at him. The invalid was peevish and suspicious. He noticed that a needle was sticking in Noémi's dress, with a thread of silk in it.

"Ah, you are beginning to work again! Have you time for that? What finery are you making?"

Noémi looked at him silently, and thought, "I am making Dodi's shroud;" and then aloud, "I am making myself a collar."

"Vanity, thy name is woman!" sighed Michael.

Noémi found a smile for him, and answered, "You are quite right."

Again the morning broke. Michael now suffered from sleeplessness; he could not close his eyes. And the thought troubled him as to what Dodi was doing. He sent Noémi out often to see if he wanted anything. And whenever she did so, she kissed the little dead child on the bier, and spoke caressing words for Michael to hear: "My little Dodi! my darling sweet, asleep again? Tell mother you love her;" and then she came back to say that Dodi wanted for nothing.

"The boy sleeps too much," said Michael; "why don't you wake him?"

"I must wake him soon," said Noémi, gently.

Michael dozed a little, only a few minutes, and woke with a start. He did not know he had been asleep. "Noémi," he cried, "Dodi was singing; I heard him: how sweetly he sings!"

Noémi pressed both her hands to her heart, and drove back the outward expression of her

agony with superhuman courage. Yes, he is already singing in heaven, amidst the angelic choir — amongst the innumerable seraphim! that was the song he joined in.

Towards evening Michael sent Noémi out. "Go and put Dodi to bed, and give him a kiss from me."

She did so. "What did Dodi say?" he asked her. Noémi could not speak; she bent over Michael and pressed a kiss on his lips.

"That was his message, the treasure!" cried Michael, and the kiss sent him to sleep. The child sent it to him from his own slumber.

The next morning he asked again about the boy. "Take Dodi out into the air; it is bad for him to be in the house; carry him into the garden."

They were about to do so. Therese had dug a grave during the night at the foot of a weeping-willow.

"You go too; and stay out there with him. I shall doze, I think, I feel so much better," Michael told Noémi.

Noémi left the sick-room and turned the

key: then they carried God's recovered angel out, and committed him to the care of the universal mother earth. Noémi would not have a mound raised over him; Michael would be so sad when he saw it, and it would retard his recovery. They made a flower-bed there, and planted in its midst a rose-tree—one of those Timar had grafted—with white flowers, whose purity was unstained. Then she went back to the sick man.

His first words were, "Where have you left Dodi?"

"Out in the garden."

"What has he on?"

"His white frock and blue ribbons."

"That suits him so well. Is he well wrapped up?"

"Oh yes, very well" (with three feet of earth).

"Bring him in when you go out again."

At this Noémi could not stop in the room; she went out and threw herself on Therese's breast, but even then she could not shed a tear. She must not. Then she tottered on into the garden, went to the willow, broke

off a bud from the rose-tree, and went back to Michael.

"Well, where's Dodi?" he said impatiently.

But Noémi knelt down by his bed and held out to him—the white rose. Michael took it and smelt it. "How curious!" he said; "this flower has no scent—as if it had grown on a grave."

She rose and went out. "What is the matter?" asked Timar, turning to Therese.

"Don't be angry," said she in a gentle soothing tone. "You were so dangerously ill. Thank heaven, you are getting over it. But this illness is infectious, and particularly during convalescence. I told Noémi that until you were quite well she must not bring the child near you. Perhaps I was wrong, but I meant it for the best."

Michael pressed her hand. "You did quite right. Stupid that I was, not to have thought of it myself. Perhaps he is not even in the next room?"

"No. We have made him a little house out in the garden." Poor thing, she told the truth.

"You are very good, Therese. Go you to Dodi and send Noémi to me. I will not ask her again to bring him to me. Poor Noémi! But as soon as I can get up and go out, you will let me go to him, won't you?"

"Yes, Michael." By this pious fraud it was possible to satisfy him till he was out of bed and on the road to recovery. He was still very weak, and could hardly walk. Noémi helped him to dress. Leaning on her shoulder, he left his room, and she led him to the little seat before the house, sat beside him, put her arm in his, and supported his head on her shoulder. It was a lovely warm summer afternoon. Michael felt as if the murmuring trees were whispering in his ears, as if the humming bees brought him a message, and the grass made music at his feet. His head swam.

One thought grew on him. When he looked at Noémi, a painful suspicion awoke in his breast. There was something in her expression which he could not understand; he must know it. "Noémi."

"What is it, my Michael?"

"Darling Noémi, look at me." She raised her eyes to his. "Where is little Dodi?"

The poor creature could no longer hide her grief. She raised her martyr face to heaven, stretched up both hands, and faltered, "There! . . . there!"

"He is dead!" Michael could hardly utter the words. Noémi sank on his breast. Her tears were no longer to be controlled; she sobbed violently.

He put his arm round her and let her weep on. It would have been sacrilege not to let these tears have free course.

He had no tears—no. He was all wonder; he was amazed at the greatness of soul which raised the poor despised creature so far above himself. That she should have been able to conceal her sorrow so long out of tender consideration for him whom she loved! How great that love must be! When the paroxysm was over she looked smiling at Timar, like the sun through the rainbow.

"And you could keep this from me?"

"I feared for your life."

"You dared not weep lest I should see traces of tears."

"I waited for the time when I might weep."

"When you were not with me, you nursed the sick child, and I was angry with you."

"You were never unkind, Michael."

"When you took my kiss to him you knew it was a farewell. When I reproached you with your vanity you were sewing his shroud; when you showed me a cheerful face your heart was pierced with the seven wounds of the Blessed Virgin! Oh, Noémi, I worship you!"

But the poor thing only asked him to love her. Michael drew her on to his knee. The leaves, the grass, the bees, whispered now so clearly that he began to understand the swimming in his head.

After a long and gloomy silence he spoke again. "Where have you laid him? Take me to him, Noémi."

"Not to-day," said Noémi. "It is too far for you—to-morrow."

But neither to-morrow nor the next day would she take him there.

"You would sit by the grave and make yourself ill again: that is why I have made no mound over him, nor raised a cross, that you may not go there and grieve."

Timar, however, was sad at this. When he was strong enough to walk alone, he went about seeking for what they would not show him.

One day he came back to the house with a cheerful face. In his hand he held a half-blown rosebud, one of those white ones which have no scent. "Is it this?" he asked Noémi.

She nodded: it could no longer be concealed. The white rose had put him on the track, and he noticed that it had been newly transplanted. And then he was tranquil, like one who has done with all that had given an object to life. He sat all day on the little bench near the house, drew on the gravel with his stick, and muttered to himself, "You would not exchange him for the whole earth full of diamonds, nor the whole heaven full of angels;

. . . but for a miserable pipe you could strike his hand."

The beautiful walnut-wood house stood half finished, and the great convolvulus had crept over its four walls. Michael never set foot in it.

The only thing that kept up his half-recovered strength and his broken spirit was Noémi's love.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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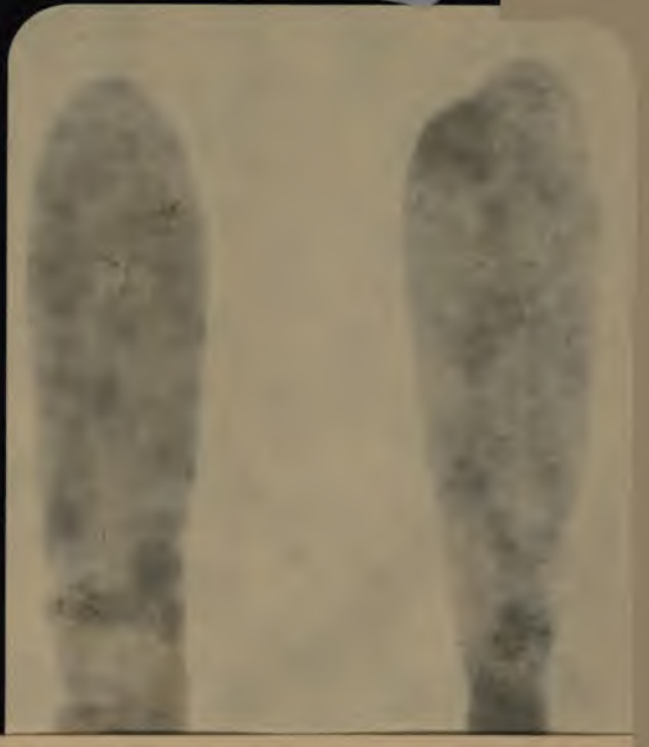

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